



CHINESE MYTHOLOGY

The Myths Of Ancient China

Our history is no theory waiting, to be recognized by any one. The man kind history, our history, it needs just to be read and appreciated by us

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FATEH.Z. FENNI

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HISTORY

Chinese mythology is the set of stories, legends and rituals passed down from generation to generation orally or in writing. There are several themes in Chinese mythology, including myths surrounding the foundation of Chinese culture and the Chinese state. As in many mythologies, it is believed that it is a form of commemoration of past events.

*Historians assume that the Chinese mythology begins around 1100 BC. The myths and legends have been passed down orally for about a thousand years before being written in the early books like: **Shui Jing Zhu** and **Shan Hai Jing**. Other myths continued to be passed through oral traditions such as theater and song, before being written in books as in **Fengshen Yanyi**.*

Myths and legends

Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors

After the era of Nu Kua and Fu Xi (or contemporaneously in some versions) came the age of the Three August and Five Emperors (三皇 五帝), a group of legendary legislators who ruled between 2850 BC and 2205 BC, the period before the **Xia Dynasty**.

The list of names comprising the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors vary widely between sources, but the best known version and the largest circulation is:

The Three August:

Fuxi (伏羲) - Partner nüwa.

Shennong (神农) - Shennong, which means "Divine Farmer" taught agriculture and medicine to old.

Huangdi (黄帝) - Huangdi, meaning, and known as the "Yellow Emperor", considered the first ruler of China.

Five Emperors:

Shaohao (少昊) - Leader of the Dongyi or "Eastern Barbarians", its pyramidal tomb is located in Shandong province.

Zhuanxu (颛顼) - grandson of the Yellow Emperor.

Ku (帝 嚳) - Great-grandson of the Yellow Emperor and Zhuanxu nephew.

Yao (尧) - Ku son. His elder brother succeeded Ku, but abdicated to feel an ineffective legislature.

Shun (舜) - Yao left his position to Shun at the expense of his own son because of the ability and moral Shun.

These legislators were considered extremely moral and benevolent, examples to be followed by kings and emperors later. When **Qin Shi Huang** united China in 221 BC, he felt that his achievements surpassed those of all sovereigns who had preceded him. So he combined the old titles Huang (皇) and Di (帝) to create a new, Huangdi (皇帝), usually translated as Emperor.

Great Flood

Chinese mythology shares with Sumerian mythologies, Greek, Mayan, with Judaism and hundreds of traditions a period known as the Deluge or Great Flood. The Chinese ruler Da Yu, with the help of the goddess Nu Kua, helped dig the canals that controlled the flood and allowed the people the cultivation of land.

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Religion and Mythology

There was much exchange between Chinese mythology, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, causing the birth of traditional Chinese religions. On the one hand, pre-existing mythology elements were merged with those religions as they were developed (in the case of Taoism), or were assimilated into the Chinese culture (the case of Buddhism). On the other hand, elements of the teachings and beliefs of these systems were incorporated into Chinese mythology. For example, the Taoist belief in a paradise was merged into mythology as the place where the immortals and deities reside. Meanwhile, the myth of the benevolent rulers of the past, in the form of the Three August and Five Emperors, became part of the Confucian political philosophy of primitivism.

The Chinese folk religion, the result of all this exchange and syncretism, was the official religion of China until the fall of the monarchy (1911). It was practiced at its best by the Chinese Emperor and centered on the worship of Shangdi or Tian, which is the Chinese supreme God:

What it is, or what was the official religion?

Its center was the worship of Shang Ti (or Tian), the supreme being, the universal coordinator. The circle stood the cult and the rule of demons. Between the center and circumference, they were, in concentric circles, the various deities, sages, the ancestors and deified men. The supreme act of national worship was the imperial sacrifice to Shang Ti. Only the Emperor, the priest grain in the world, the Son of Heaven, could offer the sacrifice that went back to the most ancient, and remained until the fall of the Empire.

Deities

*It is believed that the Jade Emperor is God or most important deity. The origins of the Jade Emperor and how it came to be considered a deity are unknown. Also known as **Yu Huang Shang-ti**, his name means "the Augusta Jade Personality". It is considered the first god and responsible for all the gods and goddesses.*

Mostly Chinese myths involve moral issues that inform the people of their culture and their values. There are many stories that can be studied or collected in China.

Deities Of Taoist Origin

The Three Pure Ones (三清) - The Three Pure Ones are the Taoist trinity of gods representing the supreme principles.

Four Emperors (四御) - heavenly Kings of Taoism.

The Jade Emperor (玉皇大帝) - The Jade Emperor is the supreme ruler of all, counted among the main Taoist deities.

Beiji Dadi (中天紫微北极大帝) - Ruler of the stars.

Tianhuang Dadi (勾陈上宫天皇大帝) - ruler of the gods.

Empress of the Earth (后土皇地祇)

Xi Wangmu (西王母) - Xi Wangmu or Queen Mother of the West is the goddess who holds the secret of eternal life and the entrance to paradise. Originally it was a fierce goddess with tiger teeth and sent plagues to the world but to be incorporated into the Taoist pantheon, became a benign deity. In Chinese folk mythology, Xi Wangmu lives in a jade palace and therefore is considered the patroness of jade miners. It also has a peach tree that every three thousand years produces a peach that grants immortality.

Pak Tai or Bei Di (北帝, 真武大帝) - Taoist God of the North, Pak Tai is one of the Five Emperors since the Han Dynasty are associated with each of the cardinal points (North, South, East, West and Central) second the theory of the five elements (**wu xing**). In Hong Kong and Macau, wind deities are considered. Pak Tai is also the god of the water element associated with north as black. Your animal totem is the black turtle.

Xuan Nu (玄女) - Xuan Nu was the goddess who helped Huangdi (黄帝), the Yellow Emperor, to subdue Chi You (蚩尤) in the war between the two. After facing up nine times in a cyclical war without either of them win, the Yellow Emperor retired to Mount Tai that was shrouded in fog for three days. Then came Xuan Nu, who had one head and bird's body, and approached the Emperor informing him a strategy to win the war.

Eight Immortals (八仙)

The Eight Immortals are a Taoist belief first described in the Yuan Dynasty. The power of each immortal can be transferred to a tool that can give life and destroy evil. Most were born in the **Tang Dynasties** and **Sung**. They are not only revered by Taoists as are elements of Chinese culture. They live in Penglai Mountain.

He Xiangnu (何仙姑)

Cao Guojiu (曹國舅)

Tie Guaili (鐵拐李)

Lan Caihe (藍采和)

Lu Dongbin (呂洞賓)

Han Xiangzi (韓湘子)

Zhang Guo Lao (張果老)

Zhongli Quan (漢鍾離)

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Deities Of Buddhist Origin

Guan Yin (觀音) or Kuan Yin (觀音 菩薩) - Guan Yin is the goddess of compassion and mercy.

Hotei (彌勒 菩薩) - Hotei is a popular Buddhist deity. God of joy and fortune.

Dizang (地藏 菩薩) - Dizang is the one who saved from death.

Yanluo (閻羅) - Yanluo is the ruler of Hell (short form of Sanskrit **Yama Raja**, 閻魔羅社).

Shi Tennô (四大天王) - The Tennô Shi (Four Heavenly Kings) are gods Buddhist guardians.

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Other Deities

Erlang Shen (二郎神) - Erlang Shen is a Chinese god with a third eye on the forehead to see the truth. It is a belligerent deity and always wields a sword with three points and keeps his faithful "Heavenly Dog Sacred" (哮天犬) at his side, which helps you to subdue evil spirits. Its origin varies, sometimes being taken as the second child of Heavenly North King, **Vaishnavana**. And sometimes as nephew of the Jade Emperor (the short story *The Journey to the West*).

Lei Gong (雷公) - Lei Gong is the god of thunder. This god began its existence as a mortal, but found a peach tree that came from heaven. When he ate their peaches, became a human with wings and then received an apple and a hammer could create thunder. And thus it became the god of thunder.

Nezha (哪吒) - Nezha, also called San **Taizi** (三太子, Third Prince), is the third son of Li Jing, general of the Tang Dynasty and head of the heavenly army, in charge of putting the wicked spirits contrary to the divine will and torment men on the right path. Nezha commands a part of the army. It is said that he was born three years after pregnancy in a meat ball that his father, furious, left with a sword. Nezha then came fully armed. It has the look and capricious temperament of a child. Floats in the air thanks to wheels of fire under his feet, takes the outer ring which killed the children of the dragon king and have on hand a spear. It may have additional members and heads. Perhaps inspired by the **Vedic god Nalakuvara**.

Guan Yu (關聖帝君) - Guan Yu is the god of brotherhoods, martial arts and, when they occur, also god of war.

Zhao Gongming (赵公明) - Zhao Gongming, fortune god riding a tiger.

Bi Gan (比干) - Bi Gan is also a god of fortune. It is often confused with Wu Cai Shen (武财神) riding a tiger and uses a fishing rod.

Kui Xing (魁星) - Kui Xing is the god of exams and assist the god of literature, Wen Chang. Kui Xing was an ugly but clever, dwarf who became patron of those paying the imperial examinations. Pictured on a turtle holding a brush to write.

Sun Wukong (孫悟空) - Sun Wukong is the monkey god of legend *Journey to the West*.

Daoji (道濟) - Daoji was a Buddhist monk during the Song Dynasty and became a god because of its practical life.

Matsu (媽祖) - Matsu, the goddess of the ocean, also known as Paradise Queen (天后). According to legend, she was born in 960 (during the Sung Dynasty) as the seventh daughter of **Goan Lim** (林愿) on **Meizhou Island, Fujian**. There are many legends surrounding it and the sea. Although it has started to swim late, with 15 years, soon she became a great swimmer. She wore a red dress to guide the fishing boats to shore, even during storms. There are at least two versions involving her death. In one, she died in 987 at age 28, when climbed a mountain, ascended to heaven and became a goddess. Another version of the legend says that she died of exhaustion after swimming a lot in search of her father at 16. After her death, the families of many fishermen and sailors began to pray in honor of her acts of bravery trying to save them to the sea. Her worship spread rapidly. It is usually depicted wearing a red dress and sitting on a throne.

Zao Jun (灶君) - Zao Jun is a popular kitchen god. It is the most important of the myriad Chinese domestic gods (gods of the inner courtyard, wells, door openings, etc.). It is believed that each year it takes a report to the Jade Emperor of the activities of each house in order to be rewarded or punished according to them.

Tu Di Gong (土地公) - Tu Di Gong is the earth god in Taoism and Chinese folk religions. People resort to it when they want good crops, health and when they bury their loved ones. Each village in China has a temple dedicated to him, but he is not an all-powerful God, it is more like a bureaucrat.

Shing Wong (城隍) - Shing Wong is the god responsible for trade in a city.

Zhong Kui or Jung Kwa (鍾馗) - Zhong Kui, famous mythological person for subduing demons. It was approved in the imperial examinations, but the emperor did not allow him to take his position for being too ugly. Angrily, Zhong Kui committed suicide and was buried by his friend. After becoming king of the spirits of Hell, he returned to thank the kindness of his friend.

Long Mu (龍母) - Long Mu is known to have created five dragons and so it is also called the Mother of Dragons. Long Mu lived with her family on the bank of a river, where she washed clothes and fished. One day an egg found on the banks of this river which snakes were born five (or one second some versions). Even being poor, Long Mu gave the best of their food to feed the snakes and they helped her catching fish in the river. With time they grew and became clear that they were not snakes, but dragon. The Chinese believe that the dragons have the power to control the time and so, during a drought, Long Mu asked them to do rain and that made the villagers happy, so they gave her the name "Mother of Dragons." The news came that made the Emperor **Qin Shihuang** who sent her gifts and requested her presence in the capital. But she was too old and died before she could go.

Hung Shing (洪聖) - Shin Hung was an official appointed to administer the province Pun Yue presently Guangdong. He encouraged the study of geography and astronomy and improved people's living conditions, especially the fishermen. So, after his death, people built several temples in his honor.

Tam Kung - Tam Kung is the god of the venerated sea in Macau and Hong Kong. It is said that it can control the time and cure diseases of children.

Wong Tai Sin (黃大仙) - Wong Tai Sin was born **Wong Cho Ping** (黃初平, Huang Chuping) in 338 in the modern city of Lanxi. He began practicing Taoism at 15 and forty years later could turn stones into sheep.

Meng Po (孟婆) - Meng Po is the goddess of forgetfulness. She prepares a tea called Five tea flavors Forgetfulness, given to the souls of people who will reincarnate to forget their former lives.

The Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors

(三皇 五帝)

Group of legendary rulers.

Zhu Rong (祝融) - god of fire.

Gong Gong (共工) - God of water, during the struggle with the god of fire, he left Mount Buzhou, broke the sky, which was then repaired by Nuwa. It is responsible for the floods. It is said that embarrassed for having lost the battle for the throne of Heaven, he hit his head against Mount Buzhou (不周山), one of the pillars of heaven. The pillar was very damaged which caused the sky to lean to the northeast and the land to the southeast, causing major flooding and suffering to people. Nuwa (女媧) cut the leg of a giant tortoise and used it to repair the damage without getting it all over and this explains why the moon, the sun and the stars move northeastward and rivers in China to southeast.

Chi You (蚩尤) - God of War. Inventor of metal weapons. Adversary Huangdi.

Yu (大禹) - Yu and Yu the Great regulates the course of rivers to control floods. It was the first emperor of the Xia Dynasty and is revered for having taught the people of China to control the floods, having spent his life looking for the solution to the problem. His perseverance was so impressed that Shun and this gave him the throne. In the place where he died during a hunt, a mausoleum was erected.

Kua Fu - Kua Fu is a giant chasing the sun One day he decided to find out where the sun was at night and pick it up without ever getting..

Cangjie (倉頡) - Cangjie created Chinese characters.

Houyi (后羿) - Houyi or just Yi is a great archer, famous for having shot down nine suns. Legend has it that in ancient times, there were ten suns in the land that replaced out one every day. One day, tired of their routines, they decided to leave all at once and the heat was such that the melted stones, people died and dried plants. So the emperor, Yao, begged the father of suns, Dijun, which controlled. The Suns did not listen to his father and so he sent Houyi to earth with a magical bow and arrows. Dijun expected Houyi just scared the suns, but when Houyi saw the devastation caused by those was seized by a fit of rage and dropped nine of them, leaving only the current. Dijun turn was furious and banished Houyi to Earth to spend the rest of his days as a mortal.

Chang'e (嫦娥) - Chang'e is the wife of Yi and goddess of the moon There are at least three versions of its history.

Qi Xi - Qi Xi is the legend known in Japan as Tanabata. She says a young shepherd named **Niulang** (牛郎, Altair star) once saw the seven fairies bathe in a lake. Encouraged by an ox, he took their clothes and waited. The fairy chose the youngest and most beautiful among them **Zhinü** (織女, the star Vega) to get the clothes back. She does, but as Niulang saw her naked, she had to agree to marry him. She accepts and becomes a good wife, and he a good husband. But the Goddess of Heaven in some versions Zhinü's mother, discovers that a mere mortal married to one of the fairies and is furious. Taking the clip of her hair, the Goddess creates a river in the sky to separate them forever (ie, the Milky Way that separates Altair and Vega). But once a year, pitying the two birds and forming a bridge in the sky (鵲橋, that Qiao) on Deneb in the constellation Cygnus and so they get together for a night, the seventh night of the seventh month.

Han Ba (旱魃) - Han Ba is an ancient goddess of drought.

Wenchang Wang (文昌王)

Gao Yao - Gao Yao is the God of justice and judgment.

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Mythological Creatures

Birds

Fenghuang - The Fenghuang is considered the Chinese phoenix.

Guang Ji (吉光)

Jian (鶼) - The jian is a mythical bird that is believed to have only one eye and one wing: a pair of these birds depend on each other, inseparable, hence, represent husband and wife.

Jingwei (精衛) - Jingwei is the mythical bird which tries to fill the ocean with twigs and pebbles. In fact Jingwei was the daughter of Emperor Yandi, but died young, drowned in the East Sea. After his death she decided to be reborn as a bird to take revenge from the sea bringing twigs and pebbles from the nearby mountains trying to fill it in order to prevent their tragedy from happening to others.

Shang-Yang

Jiu Tou Niao - Jiu Tou Niao is a bird of nine heads used to scare children. Legend has it that she kidnaps young girls and takes them to their cave where they are to be saved by a hero.

Su Shuang (鸕鶿) - Su Shuang is a mythological bird, also described as a water bird, like the crane.

Peng (鹏) - Peng is a giant mythical bird and awesome power of flight. Also known as Chinese roc.

Qing Niao (青鳥) - Qing Niao the messenger of Xi Wangmu.

Zhu - Zhu The bird is considered a bad omen.

Dragons

The Chinese dragon is a mythological creature of the most important Chinese mythology. It is considered the most powerful and divine creature and is believed to be the regulator of all water. The dragon symbolized great power and was supporting heroes and gods. One of the most famous in Chinese mythology is **Yinglong**. Said to be the god of rain. People from different places pray to him in order to receive rain. In Chinese mythology, it is believed that dragons can create clouds with their breath. Chinese people often use the term "Descendants of the Dragon" as a symbol of their ethnic identity.

Huanglong - Huanglong, Yellow Dragon, known for his wisdom.

Yinglong - Yinglong is a powerful servant of Huangdi. A legend says that Yinglong helped a man named **Yu (禹)** to stop a flood of the Yellow River opening channels with its tail.

Dragon Kings (龍王)

The Dragon Kings are the four leaders of the four oceans (each corresponds to a cardinal point). They live in crystal palaces on the seabed where govern animal life.

Fucanglong - Fucanglong is a dragon of the underworld that guard the buried treasure. Their departure causes the eruption of volcanoes.

Shenlong - Shenlong is a dragon that can control the winds and the rains.

Dilong - Dilong is the earth dragon.

Tianlong - Tianlong are the celestial dragons pulling the chariots of the gods and keep their palaces.

Li - Li is a dragon of smaller seas. Li do not have horns.

Jiao - The jiao is another dragon without horns that lives in marshes. The lowest dragon.

Seiryuu (Chinese: **Qing Long**, 青龍, The God Dragon of the East) - is the Japanese name of one of the Four Heavenly Gods of Buddhism, representing the North, the Blue color, the spring season and the Wood element.

The Seven Seiryuu Constellations According To The Japanese

Suboshi (Chinese: **jiao**) **Horn**

Amiboshi (Chinese: **kang**) **Neck**

Tomoboshi (Chinese: **Di**) **Root**

Soiboshi (Chinese: **FANG**) **Room**

Nakagoboshi (Chinese: **XIN**) **Heart**

Ashitareboshi (Chinese: **WEI**) **Tail**

Miboshi (Chinese: **JI**) **"Sieve separating bark grain"**

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Other Creatures

Ba She (巴蛇) - Ba She is a snake known to swallow elephants.

Qilin (in Japanese, **Kirin**) - The Qilin is a chimeric animal that brings good luck. Originally, its appearance refers to the giraffe.

Long Ma (龍馬) - The Long Ma is a similar animal to Qilin.

Kui (夔) - Kui is a mythological monster like an ox with one leg.

Kun (鯪) - The Kun is a monstrous giant fish. It is said that can turn into birds, and so are able to travel six months without rest, as with wings beating run several miles.

Jiang Shi - Jian Shi, also known as Chinese vampires are resurrected bodies of people whose soul could not leave the body and suck the life essence (**ki**) of other beings.

Luduan - A Luduan is a beast able to sense the truth. Because of this power, the emperors of the Qing Dynasty Qianlong put as many pictures of these animals on their thrones.

Yaoguai - Yaoguais are evil spirits and demons. Usually the spirit of an animal that has gained powers through Taoist practice and you want to get immortality and be worshiped. Many are pets of the gods and others have power enough to control a small number of other yaoguai. Di Yu is dwelling place of many of them.

Hulijing - Hulijing are fox spirits. They can take human form and be good or bad.

Nian - The Nian is a beast that lives under the sea and coming to earth in the New Year to devour people, which try to scare her dancing, bursting firecrackers and beating drums, and decorate it with red, because the beast does not like that color.

Ox Head (牛頭) and **Horse Face (馬面) (牛頭馬面)** - Ox Head and Horse Face are young messengers of Hell. They are the first people who find dead after arriving to the underworld. In many stories, they escort the dead to the underworld (apparently some people try to escape). In the classic story Journey to the West, the two are sent to capture **Sun Wukong**, but are overcome by it. After that, Sun Wukong goes to the underworld and scratching his name and that of your loved the list of living people, obtaining thus the immortality for all.

Pi Xie (貔貅) - A Pi Xie or Pixiu is a similar creature to **Rui Shi** and descending dragons able to attract good luck and fortune. It has huge appetite for gold and silver.

Rui Shi (瑞獅) - Rui Shi are the lions protect the entrance of specific places, in particular, palaces, tombs and imperial temples. Usually appear in pairs, the male has in his paw a globe and protects property, and the female a puppy and protects people.

Tao Tie (饕餮) - The Tao Tie a mythological figure similar to the **gargoyle**, often found on ancient bronze vessels, representing greed. It is said to be the fifth child of a dragon and has appetite size eating his own head.

Xiao (魍魎) - A Xiao is the spirit of a mountain or demon.

Xiezhi (解豸) - A Xiezhi is a beast of a horn.

Xing Tian (刑天 "Punished" or "He punished by Heaven") - Xing Tian is a giant headless. He was beheaded by the Yellow Emperor as punishment for challenging him. Having no head, his face is on his back. He roams the fields and roads and is usually depicted carrying a shield and an ax and making a fierce war dance.

Mythological Places

List of places in Chinese mythology

Xuanpu (玄圃) - A fairyland on Kunlun Mountain (崑崙).

Yaochi (瑤池) - Address of the immortals where **Xiwangmu** lives.

Fusang (扶桑) - mythical island, often interpreted as Japan.

What Qiao (鵲橋) - The bridge formed by birds across the Milky Way.

Penglai (蓬萊) - Paradise, a legendary island in the China Sea.

Longmen (龍門) - The dragon gate where a carp can become a dragon.

Di Yu (地獄) - Chinese Hell.

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Writing Myths

In its shape, most of the myths known today is derived from documentation in the following texts:

Shan Hai Jing - Literally meaning Writ of Mountain and Sea, the Shan Hai Jing describes the myths, magic and religion of ancient China in detail and also documents the geography "sea and mountain", history, medicine, customs and ethnic groups in ancient times. It is known as one of the first encyclopedias China.

Shui Jing Zhu - Literally meaning Comments About Scroll of Water, this text began to be written as a set of comments on the parchment of water, but became famous for the novelty of his extensive documentation of geography, history and legends associated.

Hei'an Zhuan - The Epic of Darkness, is the only collection of legends in the form of epic poetry preserved by a community of Han China, more precisely, the inhabitants of the mountainous area of **Shennongjia** in **Hubei**, containing accounts ranging from birth Pan Ku to the historic era.

Imperial historical documents and philosophical books as **Shangshu, Shiji, the Liji, Lushi Chunqiu**, among others.

Some myths have survived in the theater and literature, as parts or novels. Fiction seen as sponsor of these myths include:

The poetry of ancient states such as **Lisao** of **Qu Yuan** of **Chu** State.

Fengshen Yanyi (封神演義), or Anointing of the Gods, which deals with the **Zhou Dynasty** Foundation.

Journey to the West, **Wu Cheng'en** a fictionalized account of **Xuanzang's** pilgrimage to India, where the pilgrims are a variety of spirits, monsters and demons.

The **Baishe Zhuan**, a romantic tale that takes place in **Hangzhou** involving a snake who takes human form and falls in love with a man.

Literary sources of Chinese mythology:

Zhiguai, literary genre that deals with events and strange stories (supernatural majority).

Tales Strange a Chinese Studio written by **Pu Songling**, with many stories of demon foxes.

Imperial historical documents and philosophical books as **Shangshu, Shiji, the Liji, Lushi Chunqiu**, among others.

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FIRST GODS

SHANG DI

Shangdi (Chinese: 上帝; pinyin: Shàngdì; Wade–Giles: Shang Ti), also written simply as **Di** (Chinese: 帝; pinyin: Dì; Wade–Giles: Ti; "Deity", "Emperor"), is the Chinese term for "Supreme Deity" or "Highest Deity".

Tian ("Heaven" or "Great Whole"), it is one of the terms used to refer to the absolute God of the universe in philosophy, Confucianism, the Chinese traditional religions and its various sects (such as **Yiguandao**) and Chinese Protestant Christianity, while its usage among contemporary and secular Chinese, Hong Kong, and Taiwanese societies typically imply a universal deity that is equivalent to the same usage as it is in Christianity.

Etymology

The name is the pinyin romanization of two Chinese characters. The first – 上, Shàng – means "high", "highest", "first", "primordial"; the second – 帝, Dì – is the same character used in the name of Huangdi—the Yellow Emperor or Yellow Deity, incarnation of Shangdi and originator of the Chinese civilization—and the homonymous huangdi, title of the emperors of China, and is usually translated as "emperor", but it properly means "deity" (manifested god).

The name Shangdi is thus generally translated as "Highest Deity", but also "Primordial Deity" or "First Deity". The deity preceded the title and the emperors of China were named after him in their role as **Tianzi**, the sons of Heaven.

History

Shang dynasty

The earliest references to Shangdi are found in oracle bone inscriptions of the Shang Dynasty in the 2nd millennium BC, although the later work *Classic of History* claims yearly sacrifices were made to him by Emperor Shun, even before the Xia Dynasty.

Shangdi was regarded as the ultimate spiritual power by the ruling elite of the **Huaxia** during the Shang dynasty: he was believed to control victory in battle, success or failure of harvests, weather conditions such as the floods of the Yellow River, and the fate of the kingdom. Shangdi seems to have ruled a hierarchy of other gods controlling nature, as well as the spirits of the deceased. These ideas were later mirrored or carried on by the Taoist Jade Emperor and his celestial bureaucracy.

Shangdi was probably more transcendental than immanent, only working through lesser gods. Shangdi was considered too distant to be worshiped directly by ordinary mortals. Instead, the Shang kings proclaimed that Shangdi had made himself accessible through the souls of their royal ancestors, both in the legendary past and in recent generations as the departed Shang kings joined him in the afterlife. The emperors could thus successfully entreat Shangdi directly. Many of the oracle bone inscriptions record these petitions, usually praying for rain but also seeking approval from Shangdi for state action.

Zhou dynasty

In the later Shang and Zhou dynasties, Shangdi was conflated with Heaven (天, Tiān). The Duke of Zhou justified his clan's usurpation through the concept of the Mandate of Heaven, which proposed that the protection of Shangdi was not connected to their clan membership but by their just governance. Shangdi was no longer tribal but instead an unambiguously good moral force, exercising its power according to exacting standards. It could thus be lost and even "inherited" by a new dynasty, provided they upheld the proper rituals.

Nonetheless, the connection of many rituals with the Shang clan meant that Shang nobles continued to rule several locations (despite their rebellions) and to serve as court advisors and priests. The Duke of Zhou even created an entire ceremonial city along strict cosmological principals to house the Shang aristocracy and the nine tripods representing Huaxia sovereignty; the Shang were then charged with maintaining the Rites of Zhou. Likewise, the Shang's lesser houses, the shi knightly class, developed directly into the learned Confucian gentry and scholars who advised the Zhou rulers on courtly etiquette and ceremony. The Confucian classics carried on and ordered the earlier traditions, including the worship of Shangdi.

The Four Books mention Shangdi as well but, as it is a later compilation, the references are much more sparse and abstract. Shangdi appears most commonly in earlier works: this pattern may reflect increasing rationalization of Shangdi over time, the shift from a known and arbitrary tribal god to a more abstract and philosophical concept, or his conflation and absorption by other deities.

Han dynasty

By the time of the Han dynasty, the influential Confucian scholar Zheng Xuan glossed: "Shangdi is another name for Heaven".

Dong Zhongshu said: "**Heaven is the ultimate authority, the king of gods who should be admired by the king**".

In later eras, he was commonly known by the name "Heavenly Ruling Highest Deity" (皇天上帝, Huángtiān Shàngdì) and, in this usage, he is especially conflated with the Taoist Jade Emperor.

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Contemporary Confucianism

Contemporary Confucian theologians have emphasized differences between the Confucian idea of Shangdi, conceived as both transcendent and immanent, and act only as a governor of the world, and the Christian idea of God, which they conceived contrary to those of Christian as a deity that is completely otherworldly (transcendent) and is merely a creator of the world.

Worship

As mentioned above, sacrifices offered to Shangdi by the king are claimed by traditional Chinese histories to predate the Xia dynasty. The surviving archaeological record shows that by the Shang, the shoulder blades of sacrificed oxen were used to send questions or communication through fire and smoke to the divine realm, a practice known as *scapula_mancy*. The heat would cause the bones to crack and royal diviners would interpret the marks as Shangdi's response to the king. Inscriptions used for divination were buried into special orderly pits, while those that were for practice or records were buried in common pits after use.

Under Shangdi or his later names, the deity received sacrifices from the ruler of China in every Chinese dynasty annually at a great Temple of Heaven in the imperial capital. Following the principles of Chinese geomancy, this would always be located in the southern quarter of the city. During the ritual, a completely healthy bull would be slaughtered and presented as an animal sacrifice to Shangdi. The Book of Rites states the sacrifice should occur on the "longest day" on a round-mound altar. The altar would have three tiers: the highest for Shangdi and the Son of Heaven; the second-highest for the sun and moon; and the lowest for the natural gods such as the stars, clouds, rain, wind, and thunder.

It is important to note that Shangdi is never represented with either images or idols. Instead, in the center building of the Temple of Heaven, in a structure called the "Imperial Vault of Heaven", a "spirit tablet" (神位, or *shénwèi*) inscribed with the name of Shangdi is stored on the throne, **Huangtian Shangdi (皇天上帝)**. During an annual sacrifice, the emperor would carry these tablets to the north part of the Temple of Heaven, a place called the "Prayer Hall For Good Harvests", and place them on that throne.

Conflation with Concept of the Universal God

See also: Chinese Rites controversy, Names of God in China, and Unknown God

It was during Ming and Qing dynasty, when Christianity was introduced by Jesuit Priest Matteo Ricci, that the idea of "Shangdi" started to be applied to the Christian conception of God.

While initially he utilized the term *Tianzhu*, Ricci gradually changed the translation into "Shangdi" instead. His usage of Shangdi was contested by Confucians, as they believed that the concept of Tian and "Shangdi" is different from that of Christian's God: **Zhōng Shǐ-shēng**, through his books, stated that Shangdi only governs, while Christian's God is a creator, and thus differ. Ricci's translation also invited the displeasure of Dominicans and that of the Roman Curia; On March 19, 1715, Pope Clement XI released the Edict *Ex Illa Die*, stating that Catholics must use "**Tianzhu**" instead of "Shangdi" for Christianity's God.

When Protestantism entered China in the mid of 19th century, the Protestant missionaries also encountered a similar issue; some preferred the term "Shangdi", while some preferred the term *Shen* (god). A conference held in 1877 in Shanghai, discussing the translation issue, also believed that "Shangdi" of Confucianism and the Christian concept of God are different in nature.

However, by the 20th century, most British missionaries, some Catholics, Chinese Orthodox Christians, and Evangelicals preferred Shangdi as a connection with Chinese native monotheism with some further the argument by linking it with the unknown god as described in bible passage of Acts 17:23-31. Catholics preferred to avoid it, due to compromises with the local authority in order to do their missions, as well as fear such translation may associate the Christian God to Chinese polytheism.

Nowadays, through the secular Chinese-language media, the Chinese word of "Shangdi", along with "Tianzhu", are frequently used to refer to the Western idea of God (**Elohim** in Hebrew, **Theos** in Greek) into Chinese, while Confucians and intellectuals in contemporary China and Taiwan attempt to realign the term to its original meaning. The Catholics officially use the term *Tianzhu* (Chinese: 天主, *Tiānzhǔ*), lit. "The Lord of Heaven", while Evangelicals typically utilize Shangdi (上帝).

TIAN

Tiān (天) is one of the oldest Chinese terms for heaven and a key concept in Chinese mythology, philosophy, and religion. During the Shang Dynasty (17–11th centuries BC), the Chinese referred to their supreme god as Shàngdì (上帝, "Lord on High") or Dì (帝, "Lord"). During the following Zhou Dynasty, Tiān became synonymous with this figure. Heaven worship was, before the 20th century, an orthodox state religion of China.

In Taoism and Confucianism, Tiān is often translated as "Heaven" and is mentioned in relationship to its complementary aspect of Dì (地), which is most often translated as "Earth". These two aspects of Taoist cosmology are representative of the dualistic nature of Taoism. They are thought to maintain the two poles of the Three Realms (三界) of reality, with the middle realm occupied by Humanity (人, Rén).

Characters

The modern Chinese character 天 and early seal script both combine dà 大 "great; large" and yī 一 "one", but some of the original characters in Shāng oracle bone script and Zhōu bronzeware script anthropomorphically portray a large head on a great person. The ancient oracle and bronze ideograms for dà 大 depict a stick figure person with arms stretched out denoting "great; large". The oracle and bronze characters for tiān 天 emphasize the cranium of this "great (person)", either with a square or round head, or head marked with one or two lines. Schuessler (2007:495) notes the bronze graphs for tiān, showing a person with a round head, resemble those for dīng 丁 "4th Celestial stem", and suggests "The anthropomorphic graph may or may not indicate that the original meaning was 'deity', rather than 'sky'."

Two variant Chinese characters for tiān 天 "heaven" are 𠀤 (written with 王 wáng "king" and 八 bā "8") and the Daoist coinage 𠀤 (with 青 qīng "blue" and 氣 "qì", i.e., "blue sky").

Interpretation by Western Sinologists

The sinologist Herrlee Creel, who wrote a comprehensive study on :
"The Origin of the Deity T'ien" (1970:493–506), gives this overview.

For three thousand years it has been believed that from time immemorial all Chinese revered T'ien 天, "Heaven," as the highest deity, and that this same deity was also known as Ti 帝 or Shang Ti 上帝. But the new materials that have become available in the present century, and especially the Shang inscriptions, make it evident that this was not the case. It appears rather that T'ien is not named at all in the Shang inscriptions, which instead refer with great frequency to Ti or Shang Ti. T'ien appears only with the **Chou**, and was apparently a Chou deity. After the conquest the Chou considered T'ien to be identical with the Shang deity Ti (or Shang Ti), much as the Romans identified the Greek Zeus with their Jupiter. (1970:493)

Creel refers to the historical shift in ancient Chinese names for "god"; from Shang oracles that frequently used di and shangdi and rarely used tian to Zhou bronzes and texts that used tian more frequently than its synonym shangdi.

First, Creel analyzes all the tian and di occurrences meaning "god; gods" in Western Zhou era Chinese classic texts and bronze inscriptions. The **Yi Jing** "Classic of Changes" has 2 tian and 1 di; the **Shi Jing** "Classic of Poetry" has 140 tian and 43 di or shangdi; and the authentic portions of the **Shu Jing** "Classic of Documents" have 116 tian and 25 di or shangdi. His corpus of authenticated Western Zhou bronzes (1970:464–75) mention tian 91 times and di or shangdi only 4 times. Second, Creel contrasts the disparity between 175 occurrences of di or shangdi on Shang era oracle inscriptions with "at least" 26 occurrences of tian. Upon examining these 26 oracle scripts that scholars (like Guo Moruo) have identified as tian 天 "heaven; god" (1970:494–5), he rules out 8 cases in fragments where the contextual meaning is unclear. Of the remaining 18, Creel interprets 11 cases as graphic variants for da "great; large; big" (e.g., tian i shang 天邑商 for da i shang 大邑商 "great settlement Shang"), 3 as a place name, and 4 cases of oracles recording sacrifices yu tian 于天 "to/at Tian" (which could mean "to Heaven/God" or "at a place called Tian".)

The Shu Jing chapter "**Tang Shi**" (湯誓 "Tang's Speech") illustrates how early Zhou texts used tian "heaven; god" in contexts with shangdi "god". According to tradition, Tang of Shang assembled his subjects to overthrow King **Jie** of Xia, the infamous last ruler of the Xia Dynasty, but they were reluctant to attack.

The king said,

"Come, ye multitudes of the people, listen all to my words. It is not I, the little child [a humble name used by kings], who dare to undertake what may seem to be a rebellious enterprise; but for the many crimes of the sovereign of **Hsiâ** [Xia] Heaven has given the charge to destroy him. Now, ye multitudes,...

you are saying, 'Our prince does not compassionate us, but (is calling us) away from our husbandry to attack and punish the ruler of **Hsiâ**.'

I have indeed heard these words of you all; but the sovereign of **Hsiâ** is an offender, and, as I fear God [shangdi], I dare not but punish him.

Now you are saying, 'What are the crimes of **Hsiâ** to us?'

The king of **Hsiâ** does nothing but exhaust the strength of his people, and exercise oppression in the cities of **Hsiâ**. His people have all become idle in his service, and will not assist him.

They are saying, 'When will this sun expire? We will all perish with thee.'

Such is the course of the sovereign of **Hsiâ**, and now I must go and punish him. Assist, I pray you, me, the one man, to carry out the punishment appointed by Heaven [tian]. I will greatly reward you. On no account disbelieve me; — I will not eat my words.

If you do not obey the words which I have spoken to you, I will put your children with you to death; — you shall find no forgiveness."

(tr. James Legge 1865:173–5)

Having established that Tian was not a deity of the Shang people, Creel (1970:501–6) proposes a hypothesis for how it originated. Both the Shang and Zhou peoples pictographically represented da 大 as "a large or great man". The Zhou subsequently added a head on him to denote tian 天 meaning "king, kings" (cf. wang 王 "king; ruler", which had oracle graphs picturing a line under a "great person" and bronze graphs that added the top line). From "kings", tian was semantically extended to mean "dead kings; ancestral kings", who controlled "fate; providence", and ultimately a single omnipotent deity Tian "Heaven". In addition, tian named both "the heavens" (where ancestral kings and gods supposedly lived) and the visible "sky".

*Another possibility is that Tian may be related to **Tengri** and possibly was a loan word from a prehistoric Central Asian language (Müller 1870).*

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Chinese interpretations

Confucius

The concept of Heaven (Tian, 天) is pervasive in Confucianism. Confucius had a deep trust in Heaven and believed that Heaven overruled human efforts. He also believed that he was carrying out the will of Heaven, and that Heaven would not allow its servant, Confucius, to be killed until his work was done. Many attributes of Heaven were delineated in his Analects.

Confucius honored Heaven as the supreme source of goodness:

The Master said, "Great indeed was Yao as a sovereign! How majestic was he! It is only Heaven that is grand, and only Yao corresponded to it. How vast was his virtue! The people could find no name for it. How majestic was he in the works which he accomplished! How glorious in the elegant regulations which he instituted!" (VIII, xix, tr. Legge 1893:214)

Confucius felt himself personally dependent upon Heaven (VI, xxviii, tr. Legge 1893:193):

"Wherein I have done improperly, may Heaven reject me! may Heaven reject me!"

Confucius believed that Heaven cannot be deceived:

*The Master being very ill, **Zi Lu** wished the disciples to act as ministers to him. During a remission of his illness, he said,*

*"**Long** has the conduct of You been deceitful! By pretending to have ministers when I have them not, whom should I impose upon? Should I impose upon Heaven? Moreover, than that I should die in the hands of ministers, is it not better that I should die in the hands of you, my disciples? And though I may not get a great burial, shall I die upon the road?" (IX, xi, tr. Legge 1893:220-221)*

Confucius believed that Heaven gives people tasks to perform to teach them of virtues and morality:

The Master said,

"At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I had no doubts. At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth. At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right."

(II, iv, tr. Legge 1893:146)

He believed that Heaven knew what he was doing and approved of him, even though none of the rulers on earth might want him as a guide:

The Master said,

"Alas! there is no one that knows me." Zi Gong said, "What do you mean by thus saying - that no one knows you?" The Master replied, "I do not murmur against Heaven. I do not grumble against men. My studies lie low, and my penetration rises high. But there is Heaven - that knows me!"

(XIV, xxxv, tr. Legge 1893:288-9)

Perhaps the most remarkable saying, recorded twice, is one in which Confucius expresses complete trust in the overruling providence of Heaven:

The Master was put in fear in Kuang. He said,

*"After the death of King **Wen**, was not the cause of truth lodged here in me? If Heaven had wished to let this cause of truth perish, then I, a future mortal, should not have got such a relation to that cause. While Heaven does not let the cause of truth perish, what can the people of **Kuang** do to me?"*

(IX, v and VII, xxii, tr. Legge 1893:217-8)

Mozi

For Mozi, Heaven is the divine ruler, just as the Son of Heaven is the earthly ruler.

Mozi believed that spirits and minor demons and spirits exist or at least rituals should be performed as if they did for social reasons, but their function is to carry out the will of Heaven, watching for evil-doers and punishing them.

Mozi taught that Heaven loves all people equally and that each person should similarly love all human beings without distinguishing between his own relatives and those of others (Dubs, 1959-1960:163-172).

Mozi criticized the Confucians of his own time for not following the teachings of Confucius. In Mozi's Will of Heaven (天志), he writes:

Moreover, I know Heaven loves men dearly not without reason. Heaven ordered the sun, the moon, and the stars to enlighten and guide them. Heaven ordained the four seasons, Spring, Autumn, Winter, and Summer, to regulate them.

Heaven sent down snow, frost, rain, and dew to grow the five grains and flax and silk that so the people could use and enjoy them.

Heaven established the hills and rivers, ravines and valleys, and arranged many things to minister to man's good or bring him evil. He appointed the dukes and lords to reward the virtuous and punish the wicked, and to gather metal and wood, birds and beasts, and to engage in cultivating the five grains and flax and silk to provide for the people's food and clothing.

This has been so from antiquity to the present."

(tr. Mei 1929:145)

Schools of cosmology

There are three major schools on cosmology. Most other hypothesis were developed from them.

Gatian shuo (蓋天說) "Canopy-Heavens hypothesis" originated from the text **Zhou Bi Suan Jing**. The earth is covered by a material tian.

Huntian shuo (渾天說) "Egg-like hypothesis". The earth surrounded by a tian sphere rotating over it. The celestial bodies are attached to the tian sphere. A summary is in **Zhang Heng's** article Armillary sphere.

Xuanye shuo (宣夜說) "Firmament hypothesis". The tian is an infinite space. The celestial bodies were light matters floating on it moved by Qi. A summary by **Ji Meng (郝萌)** is in the astronomical chapters of the Book of Jin.

Sometimes the sky is divided into **Jiutian (九天)** "the nine sky divisions", the middle sky and the eight directions.

Buddhism

The Tian are the heaven worlds and pure lands in Buddhist cosmology. Some devas are also called Tian.

Taoism

The number of vertical heaven layers in Taoism is different; the most common saying is the 36 Tian developed from Durenjing (度人經).

I-Kuan Tao

In I-Kuan Tao, Tian are divided into 3 vertical worlds. **Li Tian (理天)** "heaven of truth", **Qi Tian (氣天)** "heaven of spirit" and **Xiang Tian (象天)** "heaven of matter".

Meanings

The semantics of tian developed diachronically. The **Hanyu daizidian**, an historical dictionary of Chinese characters, lists 17 meanings of tian 天, translated below.

Human forehead; head, cranium. 人的額部; 腦袋.

Anciently, to tattoo/brand the forehead as a kind of punishment. 古代一種在額頭上刺字的刑罰.

The heavens, the sky, the firmament. 天空.

Celestial bodies; celestial phenomena, meteorological phenomena. 天體; 天象.

Nature, natural. A general reference to objective inevitability beyond human will. 自然.
泛指不以人意志為轉移的客觀必然性.

Natural, innate; instinctive, inborn. 自然的; 天性的.

Natural character/quality of a person or thing; natural instinct, inborn nature, disposition. 人或物的自然形質;
天性.

A reference to a particular sky/space. 特指某一空間.

Season; seasons. Like: winter; the three hot 10-day periods [following the summer solstice]. 時令; 季節. 如:
冬天; 三伏天.

Weather; climate. 天氣; 氣候.

Day, time of one day and night, or especially the time from sunrise to sunset. Like: today; yesterday; busy all day; go fishing for three days and dry the nets for two [a **xiehouyu** simile for "unable to finish anything"].
一晝夜的時間, 或專指日出到日落的時間. 如: 今天; 昨天; 忙了一天; 三天打魚, 兩天曬網.

God, heaven, celestial spirit, of the natural world. 天神, 上帝, 自然界的主宰者.

Heaven, heavenly, a superstitious person's reference to the gods, Buddhas, or immortals; or to the worlds where they live. Like: go to heaven ["die"]; heavenly troops and heavenly generals ["invincible army"]; heavenly goddesses scatter blossoms [a Vimalakirti Sutra reference to "Buddha's arrival"].
迷信的人指神佛仙人或他們生活的那個世界. 如: 歸天; 天兵天將; 天女散花.

Anciently, the king, monarch, sovereign; also referring to elders in human relationships. 古代指君王;
也指人倫中的尊者.

Object upon which one depends or relies. 所依存或依靠的對象.

Dialect. A measure of land [shang, about 15 acres]. 方言. 垧.

A family name, surname. 姓.

The Chinese philosopher **Feng Youlan** differentiates five different meanings of tian in early Chinese writings:

(1) A material or physical T'ien or sky, that is, the T'ien often spoken of in apposition to earth, as in the common phrase which refers to the physical universe as 'Heaven and Earth' (T'ien Ti 天地).

(2) A ruling or presiding T'ien, that is, one such as is meant in the phrase, 'Imperial Heaven Supreme Emperor' (Huang T'ien Shang Ti), in which anthropomorphic T'ien and Ti are signified.

(3) A fatalistic T'ien, equivalent to the concept of Fate (ming 命), a term applied to all those events in human life over which man himself has no control. This is the T'ien Mencius refers to when he says: "As to the accomplishment of a great deed, that is with T'ien"

([Mencius], lb, 14).

(4) A naturalistic T'ien, that is, one equivalent to the English word Nature. This is the sort of T'ien described in the 'Discussion on T'ien' in the [Hsün Tzŭ] (ch. 17).

(5) An ethical T'ien, that is, one having a moral principle and which is the highest primordial principle of the universe. This is the sort of T'ien which the [Chung Yung] (Doctrine of the Mean) refers to in its opening sentence when it says: "What T'ien confers (on man) is called his nature."

(1952:31)

The Oxford English Dictionary enters the English loanword t'ien (also tayn, tyen, tien, and tiān) "Chinese thought: Heaven; the Deity." The earliest recorded usages for these spelling variants are: 1613 Tayn, 1710 Tien, 1747 Tyen, and 1878 T'ien.

Pronunciations

The Modern Standard Chinese pronunciation of 天 "sky, heaven; heavenly deity, god" is *tiān* in level first tone. The character is read as Cantonese *tin1*; Taiwanese *thiN1* or *thian1*; Vietnamese *yêu* or *thiên*; Korean *cheon* or *ch'ŏn* (천); and Japanese *ten* in On'yomi (borrowed Chinese reading) and *ame* or *sora* in Kun'yomi (native Japanese reading).

iān 天 reconstructions in Middle Chinese (ca. 6th–10th centuries CE) include *t'ien* (Bernhard Karlgren), *t'ien* (Zhou Fagao), *tʰen* > *tʰian* (Edwin G. Pulleyblank), and then (William H. Baxter, Baxter & Sagart). Reconstructions in Old Chinese (ca. 6th–3rd centuries BCE) include **t'ien* (Karlgren), **t'en* (Zhou), **hlin* (Baxter), **thîn* (Schuessler), and **ʃ'in* (Baxter & Sagart).

Etymologies

For the etymology of *tiān*, Schuessler (2007:495) links it with the Mongolian word **Tengri** "sky, heaven, heavenly deity" or the Tibeto-Burman words **Talenj** (Adi) and *tă-lyan* (Lepcha), both meaning "sky". Schuessler (2007:211) also suggests a likely connection between Chinese *tiān* 天, *diān* 巔 "summit, mountaintop", and *diān* 顛 "summit, top of the head, forehead", which have cognates such as Naga *tiŋ* "sky".

Compounds

Tiān is one of the components in hundreds of Chinese compounds. Some significant ones include:

tiānmìng (天命 "Mandate of Heaven") "divine mandate, God's will; fate, destiny; one's lifespan"

Tiānwèn (traditional Chinese: 天問; simplified Chinese: 天问; pinyin: *Tiānwèn*), the Heavenly Questions section of the *Chǔ Cí*.

tiānzǐ (天子 "Son of Heaven"), an honorific designation for the "Emperor; Chinese sovereign" (*Tiānzǐ* accounts for 28 of the 140 *tiān* occurrences in the *Shī Jīng* above.)

tiānxià (天下, lit. "all under heaven") "the world, earth; China"

tiāndì (天地, lit. "heaven and earth") "the world; the universe." (These *Hànzì* are pronounced *Ten'chi* in Japanese.)

Xíngtiān (刑天) An early mythological hero who fought against Heaven, despite being decapitated.

Tiānfáng (天房) Chinese name for Mecca, the Islamic holy city. (*Tiān* is used as translation of *Allah*)

NU KUA

Nüwa (/nỳwá/ Chinese: 女娲), also known as **Nügua**, is a goddess in ancient Chinese mythology best known for creating mankind and repairing the pillar of heaven.

Description

The **Huainanzi** relates Nüwa to the time when Heaven and Earth were in disruption:

“Going back to more ancient times, the four pillars were broken; the nine provinces were in tatters. Heaven did not completely cover [the earth]; Earth did not hold up [Heaven] all the way around [its circumference]. Fires blazed out of control and could not be extinguished; water flooded in great expanses and would not recede. Ferocious animals ate blameless people; predatory birds snatched the elderly and the weak. Thereupon, Nüwa smelted together five-colored stones in order to patch up the azure sky, cut off the legs of the great turtle to set them up as the four pillars, killed the black dragon to provide relief for Ji Province, and piled up reeds and cinders to stop the surging waters. The azure sky was patched; the four pillars were set up; the surging waters were drained; the province of Ji was tranquil; crafty vermin died off; blameless people [preserved their] lives.”

The catastrophes were supposedly caused by the battle between the deities **Gonggong** and **Zhuanxu** (an event that was mentioned earlier in the *Huainanzi*),^[a] the five-colored stones symbolize the essence of the five phases (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water), the black dragon was the essence of water and thus cause of the floods, Ji province represents the central regions (the Sinitic world).

Following this, the *Huainanzi* tells about how the sage-rulers Nüwa and Fuxi set order over the realm by following the way (道) and its potency (德).

The *Shan Hai Jing*, dated between the Warring States period and the Han Dynasty, describes Nüwa's intestines as being scattered into ten spirits.

In **Liezi** (c. 475 - 221 BC), Chapter 5 "Questions of Tang" (Chinese: 卷第五 湯問篇), author **Lie Yukou** describes Nüwa repairing the original imperfect heaven using five-colored stones, and cutting the legs off a tortoise to use as struts to hold up the sky.

In **Songs of Chu** (c. 340 - 278 BC), Chapter 3 "Asking Heaven" (Chinese: 問天), author **Qu Yuan** writes that Nüwa molded figures from the yellow earth, giving them life and the ability to bear children. After demons fought and broke the pillars of the heavens, Nüwa worked unceasingly to repair the damage, melting down the five-coloured stones to mend the heavens.

In **Shuowen Jiezi** (c. 58 - 147 AD), China's earliest dictionary, under the entry for Nüwa author **Xu Shen** describes her as being both the sister and the wife of Fuxi. Nüwa and Fuxi were pictured as having snake-like tails interlocked in an Eastern Han Dynasty mural in the **Wuliang Temple** in **Jiaxiang** county, Shandong province.

In **Duyi Zhi** (Chinese: 獨異志; c. 846 - 874 AD), Volume 3, author **Li Rong** gives this description.

"Long ago, when the world first began, there were two people, Nü Kua and her older brother. They lived on Mount **K'un-lun**. And there were not yet any ordinary people in the world. They talked about becoming husband and wife, but they felt ashamed. So the brother at once went with his sister up Mount K'un-lun and made this prayer: "Oh Heaven, if Thou wouldst send us two forth as man and wife, then make all the misty vapor gather. If not, then make all the misty vapor disperse." At this, the misty vapor immediately gathered. When the sister became intimate with her brother, they plaited some grass to make a fan to screen their faces. Even today, when a man takes a wife, they hold a fan, which is a symbol of what happened long ago."

In **Yuchuan Ziji** (Chinese: 玉川子集 c. 618 - 907 AD), Chapter 3 (Chinese: "與馬異結交詩" 也稱 "女媧本是伏羲婦"), author Lu Tong describes Nüwa as the wife of Fuxi.

In **Siku Quanshu**, **Sima Zhen** (679–732) provides commentary on the prologue chapter to **Sima Qian's Shiji**,

"Supplemental to the Historic Record: History of the Three August Ones," wherein it is found that the Three August Ones are Nüwa, Fuxi, and Shennong; Fuxi and Nüwa have the same last name, Feng (Chinese: 風).

Note:

Sima Zhen's commentary is included with the later **Siku Quanshu** compiled by **Ji Yun** and **Lu Xixiong**.

In **The Collection Four Great Books of Song** (c. 960 - 1279 AD), compiled by Li Fang and others, Volume 78 of the book Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era contains a chapter "Customs by Yingshao of the Han Dynasty" in which it is stated that there were no men when the sky and the earth were separated. Thus Nüwa used yellow clay to make people. But the clay was not strong enough so she put ropes into the clay to make the bodies erect. It is also said that she prayed to gods to let her be the goddess of marital affairs. Variations of this story exist.

Appearance in Fengshen Yanyi

Nüwa is featured within the famed **Ming** dynasty novel **Fengshen Bang**. As featured within this novel, Nüwa is very highly respected since the time of the Xia Dynasty for being the daughter of the Jade Emperor; Nüwa is also regularly called the "Snake Goddess". After the Shang Dynasty had been created, Nüwa created the five-colored stones to protect the dynasty with occasional seasonal rains and other enhancing qualities. Thus in time, **Shang Rong** asked King Zhou of Shang to pay her a visit as a sign of deep respect. After Zhou was completely overcome with lust at the very sight of the beautiful ancient goddess Nüwa (who had been sitting behind a light curtain), he would write a small poem on a neighboring wall and take his leave. When Nüwa later returned to her temple after visiting the Yellow Emperor, Nüwa would see the foulness of Zhou's words. In her anger, she swore that the Shang Dynasty would end in payment for his foulness. In her rage, Nüwa would personally ascend to the palace in an attempt to kill the king, but was suddenly struck back by two large beams of red light.

After Nüwa realized that King Zhou was already destined to rule the kingdom for twenty-six more years, Nüwa would summon her three subordinates—the Thousand-Year Vixen (later becoming **Daji**), the Jade **Pipa**, and the Nine-Headed Pheasant. With these words, Nüwa would bring destined chaos to the Shang Dynasty, "The luck Cheng Tang won six hundred years ago is dimming. I speak to you of a new mandate of heaven which sets the destiny for all. You three are to enter King Zhou's palace, where you are to bewitch him. Whatever you do, do not harm anyone else. If you do my bidding, and do it well, you will be permitted to reincarnate as human beings." Thus, with these words, Nüwa would never be heard of again, but would still be a major indirect factor towards the Shang Dynasty's fall.

PAN KU

Pangu (simplified Chinese: 盘古; traditional Chinese: 盤古; pinyin: **Pángǔ**; Wade–Giles: P'an-ku) is the first living being and the creator of all in some versions of Chinese mythology.

Pangu legend

The first writer to record the myth of Pangu was **Xu Zheng** during the Three Kingdoms period. Recently his name was found in a tomb dated 194 AD.

In the beginning there was nothing in the universe except a formless chaos. This chaos coalesced into a cosmic egg for about 18,000 years. Within it, the perfectly opposed principles of Yin and Yang became balanced, and Pangu emerged (or woke up) from the egg. Pangu is usually depicted as a primitive, hairy giant who has horns on his head and wears furs. Pangu began creating the world: he separated Yin from Yang with a swing of his giant axe, creating the Earth (murky Yin) and the Sky (clear Yang). To keep them separated, Pangu stood between them and pushed up the Sky. With each day the sky grew ten feet (3 meters) higher, the Earth ten feet thicker, and Pangu ten feet taller. In some versions of the story, Pangu is aided in this task by the four most prominent beasts, namely the Turtle, the Qilin, the Phoenix, and the Dragon.

After the 18,000 years had elapsed, Pangu died. His breath became the wind, mist and clouds; his voice, thunder; his left eye, the sun; his right eye, the moon; his head, the mountains and extremes of the world; his blood, rivers; his muscles, fertile land; his facial hair, the stars and Milky Way; his fur, bushes and forests; his bones, valuable minerals; his bone marrow, sacred diamonds; his sweat, rain; and the fleas on his fur carried by the wind became animals.

Origin of Pangu

Three main views describe the origin of the Pangu myth.

The first is that the story is indigenous and was developed or transmitted through time to Xu Zheng. Senior Scholar Wei Juxian states that the Pangu story is derived from stories during the Western Zhou Dynasty. He cites the story of Zhong (重) and Li (黎) in the "Chuyu" section of the ancient classics **Guoyu**. In it, King Zhao of Chu asked Guanshefu (觀射父) a question: "What did the ancient classic "Zhou Shu" mean by the sentence that Zhong and Li caused the heaven and earth to disconnect from each other?" The "Zhou Shu" sentence he refers to is about an earlier person, Luu Xing, who converses with King Mu of Zhou. King Mu's reign is much earlier and dates to about 1001 to 946 BC. In their conversation, they discuss a "disconnection" between heaven and earth.

Derk Bodde linked the myth to the ancestral mythologies of the Miao people and Yao people in southern China.

This is Professor Qin's reconstruction of the true creation myth preceding the myth of Pangu. Note that it is not actually a creation myth:

A brother and his sister became the only survivors of the prehistoric Deluge by crouching in a gourd that floated on water. The two got married afterwards, and a mass of flesh in the shape of a whetstone was born. They chopped it and the pieces turned into large crowds of people, who began to reproduce again. The couple were named 'Pan' and 'Gou' in the Zhuang ethnic language, which stand for whetstone and gourd respectively.

Paul Carus writes this:

P'an-Ku: The basic idea of the yih philosophy was so convincing that it almost obliterated the Taoist cosmology of P'an-Ku who is said to have chiseled the world out of the rocks of eternity. Though the legend is not held in high honor by the literati, it contains some features of interest which have not as yet been pointed out and deserve at least an incidental comment.

*P'an-Ku is written in two ways: one means in literal translations, "basin ancient", the other "basin solid". Both are homophones, i.e., they are pronounced the same way; and the former may be preferred as the original and correct spelling. Obviously the name means "aboriginal abyss," or in the terser German, Urgrund, and we have reason to believe it to be a translation of the Babylonian **Tiamat**, "the Deep."*

*The Chinese legend tells us that P'an-Ku's bones changed to rocks; his flesh to earth; his marrow, teeth and nails to metals; his hair to herbs and trees; his veins to rivers; his breath to wind; and his four limbs became pillars marking the four corners of the world, — which is a Chinese version not only of the Norse myth of the **Giant Ymir**, but also of the Babylonian story of Tiamat.*

Illustrations of P'an-Ku represent him in the company of supernatural animals that symbolize old age or immortality, viz., the tortoise and the crane; sometimes also the dragon, the emblem of power, and the phoenix, the emblem of bliss.

When the earth had thus been shaped from the body of P'an-Ku, we are told that three great rivers successively governed the world: first the celestial, then the terrestrial, and finally the human sovereign. They were followed by Yung-Ch'eng and Sui-Jen (i.e., fire-man) the later being the Chinese Prometheus, who brought the fire down from heaven and taught man its various uses.

*The Prometheus myth is not indigenous to Greece, where it received the artistically classical form under which it is best known to us. The name, which by an ingenious afterthought is explained as "the fore thinker," is originally the Sanskrit **Pramantha** and means "twirler" or "fire-stick," being the rod of hard wood which produced fire by rapid rotation in a piece of soft wood.*

We cannot deny that the myth must have been known also in Mesopotamia, the main center of civilization between India and Greece, and it becomes probable that the figure Sui-Jen has been derived from the same prototype as the Greek Prometheus.

The missionary and translator James Legge criticized Pangu.

P'an-ku is spoken of by the common people as "the first man, who opened up heaven and earth." It has been said to me in "pidgin" English that "he is all the same your Adam"; and in Taoist picture books I have seen him as a shaggy, dwarfish, Hercules, developing from a bear rather than an ape, and wielding an immense hammer and chisel with which he is breaking the chaotic rocks.

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Other Chinese creation myths

The Pangu myth appears to have been preceded in ancient Chinese literature by the existence of Shangdi or Taiyi. Other Chinese myths, such as those of Nuwa and the Jade Emperor, try to explain how people were created and do not necessarily explain the creation of the world. There are many variations of these myths.

Pangu myth in Buyei culture

According to Buyei mythology, after Pangu became an expert in rice farming after creating the world, he married the daughter of the Dragon King, and their union gave rise to the Buyei people.

*The daughter of the Dragon King and Pangu had a son named **Xinheng (新横)**. When Xinheng disrespected his mother, she returned to heaven and never came down, despite the repeated pleas of her husband and son. Pangu was forced to remarry and eventually died on the sixth day of the sixth month of the lunar calendar.*

Xinheng's stepmother treated him badly and almost killed him. When Xinheng threatened to destroy her rice harvest, she realized her mistake. She made peace with him, and they went on to pay their respects to Pangu annually on the sixth day of the sixth month of the lunar calendar. This day became an important traditional Buyei holiday for ancestral worship.

This legend of creation is one of the main characteristics that distinguish the Buyei from the Zhuang.

Pangu worship

*Pangu is worshipped at a number of shrines in contemporary China, usually with Taoist symbols, such as the **Bagua**.*

The Pangu King Temple built in 1809 is located in Guangdong Province, northwest Huadu District (west of G106 / north of S118),

north of Shiling Town at the foot of the Pangu King Mountain. The Huadu District is located north of Guangzhou to the west of the Baiyun International Airport.

YU HUANG

*The Jade Emperor (Chinese: 玉皇; pinyin: Yù Huáng or 玉帝, Yù Dì) in Chinese culture, traditional religions and myth is one of the representations of the first god (太帝 tài dì). In Taoist theology he is **Yuanshi Tianzun**, one of the Three Pure Ones, the three primordial emanations of the Tao. He is also the Cao Đài ("Highest Power") of Caodaism.*

The Jade Emperor is known by many names, including Heavenly Grandfather (天公, Tiān Gōng), which originally meant "Heavenly Duke", which is used by commoners; the Jade Lord the Highest Emperor, Great Emperor of Jade (玉皇上帝, Yu Huang Shangdi or 玉皇大帝, Yu Huang Dadi).

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Chinese mythology

There are many stories in Chinese mythology involving the Jade Emperor.

Origin

It was said that the Jade Emperor was originally the crown prince of the kingdom of Pure Felicity and Majestic Heavenly Lights and Ornaments. At birth, he emitted a wondrous light that filled the entire kingdom. When he was young, he was kind, intelligent and wise. He devoted his entire childhood to helping the needy (the poor and suffering, the deserted and single, the hungry and disabled). Furthermore, he showed respect and benevolence to both men and creatures.

After his father died, he ascended the throne. He made sure that everyone in his kingdom found peace and contentment.

After that, he told his ministers that he wished to cultivate Tao on the Bright and Fragrant Cliff.

After 1,750 kalpas, each kalpa lasting for 129,600 years, he attained Golden Immortality. After another one hundred million years of cultivation, he finally became the Jade Emperor (using the given figures, this period before his becoming the Jade Emperor lasted for a total of about 226,800,000 years.)

Vanquishing evil

One of the myths describes how the Jade Emperor became the monarch of all the deities in heaven. It is one of the few myths in which the Jade Emperor really shows his might.

In the beginning of time, the earth was a very difficult place to live, much harsher than it is now. People had to deal with a variety of monstrous beings, and they didn't have many gods to protect them; in addition, many powerful demons were defying the immortals of heaven.

The Jade Emperor was an ordinary immortal who roamed the earth helping as many people as he could. He was saddened because his powers could only ease the suffering of humans. He retreated to a mountain cave to cultivate his Tao. He passed 3,200 trials, each trial lasting about 3 million years.

On earth at this time, a powerful, evil entity had the ambition to conquer the immortals and gods in heaven and proclaim sovereignty over the entire universe.

This evil entity also went into retreat and meditation to expand its power, though later than the Jade Emperor did. He passed through 3,000 trials, each trial lasting about 3 million years.

After its final trial, it felt confident that no one could defeat it. It re-entered the world and recruited an army of demons with the purpose of attacking heaven.

The immortals, being aware of the threat, gathered themselves and prepared for war.

The gods were unable to stop the powerful demon and it defeated them all.

The Jade Emperor finished his cultivation during this war. When he was changing the land to make it more livable for men and repelling a variety of monsters, he saw an evil glow emitting from heaven and knew something was amiss.

He ascended and saw that the evil entity was too powerful to be stopped by the gods. He challenged it, and they fought. Mountains shook and rivers and seas toppled. Due to his deeper and wiser cultivation, his benevolence instead of his might, the Jade Emperor won the battle.

After defeating the evil entity, its army was scattered by the gods and immortals.

Because of his noble and benevolent deeds, the gods, immortals and humans proclaimed the Jade Emperor the supreme sovereign of all.

Creation

The world started with **wuji** (無極, nothingness) according to the Chinese creation myth. The Jade Emperor was the head of the pantheon, but not responsible for creation.

In another creation myth, the Jade Emperor fashioned the first humans from clay and left them to harden in the sun. Rain deformed some of the figures, which gave rise to human sickness and physical abnormalities. (The most common alternative Chinese creation myth states that human beings were once fleas on the body of Pangu.)

In another myth, Nüwa fashions men out of the mud from the Yellow River by hand. Those she made became the richer people of the earth. After getting lazy, she dipped her scarf into the mud and swung it around. The drops that fell from the scarf became the poorer humans.

In The Journey to the West

*In the popular novel by **Wu Cheng'en**, the Jade Emperor is featured many times in the story.*

The Weaver Girl and the Cowherd

In another story, popular throughout Asia and with many differing versions, the Jade Emperor has a daughter named **Zhinü** (simplified Chinese: 织女; traditional Chinese: 織女; pinyin: zhī nǚ or Chih'nü, literally: weaver girl). She is most often represented as responsible for weaving colorful clouds in the heaven. In some versions she is the Goddess Weaver, daughter of the Jade Emperor and the Celestial Queen Mother, who weaves the Silver River (known in the West as the Milky Way), which gives light to heaven and earth. In other versions, she is a seamstress who works for the Jade Emperor.

Every day Zhinü descended to earth with the aid of a magical robe to bathe. One day, a lowly cowherd named Niu Lang (Chinese: 牛郎; pinyin: niú láng) spotted Zhinü as she bathed in a stream. Niu Lang fell instantly in love with her and stole her magic robe which she had left on the bank of the stream, leaving her unable to escape back to Heaven. When Zhinü emerged from the water, Niu Lang grabbed her and carried her back to his home.

When the Jade Emperor heard of this matter, he was furious but unable to intercede, since in the meantime his daughter had fallen in love and married the cowherd. As time passed, Zhinü grew homesick and began to miss her father. One day, she came across a box containing her magic robe which her husband had hidden. She decided to visit her father back in Heaven, but once she returned, the Jade Emperor summoned a river to flow across the sky (the Milky Way), which Zhinü was unable to cross to return to her husband. The Emperor took pity on the young lovers, and so once a year on the seventh day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar, he allows them to meet on a bridge over the river.

The story refers to constellations in the night sky. Zhinü is the star Vega in the constellation of **Lyra east** of the Milky Way, and **Niu Lang** is the star Altair in the constellation of Aquila west of the Milky Way. Under the first quarter moon (7th day) of the seventh lunar month (around August), the lighting condition in the sky causes the Milky Way to appear dimmer, hence the story that the two lovers are no longer separated on that one particular day each year.

The seventh day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar is a holiday in China called **Qixi Festival**, which is a day for young lovers much like Valentine's Day in the West. In Japan, it is called **Tanabata** (star day). In Korea, it is called **Chilseok**. In Vietnam, it is called **Thất Tịch** and if it rains on that day, it is said to be Zhinü crying tears of happiness for being reunited with her husband.

The zodiac

There are several stories as to how the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac were chosen.

In one, the Jade Emperor, although having ruled Heaven and Earth justly and wisely for many years, had never had the time to actually visit the Earth personally. He grew curious as to what the creatures looked like. Thus, he asked all the animals to visit him in heaven. The cat, being the most handsome of all animals, asked his friend the Rat to wake him on the day they were to go to Heaven so he wouldn't oversleep. The Rat, however, was worried that he would seem ugly compared to the cat, so he didn't wake the cat. Consequently, the cat missed the meeting with the Jade Emperor and was replaced by the Pig. The Jade Emperor was delighted with the animals and so decided to divide the years up amongst them. When the cat learned of what had happened, he was furious with the Rat and that, according to the story, is why cats and Rats are enemies to this day.

The cat however, does have a place in the Vietnamese zodiac, replacing the Rabbit.

His predecessor and successor

The Jade Emperor was originally the assistant of the Divine Master of the Heavenly Origin, **Yuanshi Tianzun**. Yuanshi Tianzun is said to be the supreme beginning, the limitless and eternal creator of Heaven and Earth, who picked **Yu-huang**, or the Jade Emperor, as his personal successor.

The Jade Emperor will eventually be succeeded by the Heavenly Master of the Dawn of Jade of the Golden Door (金闕玉晨天尊). The characters for both are stamped on the front of the arms of his throne. In two folk automatic writing texts in 1925 and 1972, **Guan Yu** became the 18th Jade Emperor in about 1840 AD; however, some have disagreed that Guan Yu has succeeded, and thus the Jade Emperor and Guan Yu are often worshiped separately.

In **Tienti** teachings, the current jade emperor has 55 predecessors.

Worship and festivals

The Jade Emperor's Birthday (天公誕) is said to be the ninth day of the first lunar month. On this day Taoist temples hold a Jade Emperor ritual (拜天公, bài Tiān Gōng, literally "heaven worship") at which priests and laymen prostrate themselves, burn incense and make food offerings.

In the morning of this birthday, Chinese and Taiwanese households set up an altar table with 3 layers: one top (containing offertories of six vegetables (六齋), noodles, fruits, cakes, tangyuan, vegetable bowls, and unripe betel, all decorated with paper lanterns) and two lower levels (containing the five sacrifices and wines) to honor the deities below the Jade Emperor. The household then kneels three times and kowtows nine times to pay homage and wish him a long life.

Yuk Wong Kung Tin (玉皇宮殿) a.k.a. Yuk Wong Po Tin (玉皇寶殿) is a temple in A Kung Ngam, Hong Kong, dedicated to the Jade Emperor. In the mid-19th century, people from Huizhou and Chaozhou mined stones in the hill for the development of the central urban area. They set up a shrine to worship Yuk Wong. At the beginning of the 20th century, the shrine was developed into a small temple and was renovated many times. The latest renovation was in 1992.

Toponyms

A crater on Saturn's moon Rhea, discovered by Voyager 2 spacecraft, is named after him.

***THE THREE
SOVEREIGNS
AND
FIVE EMPERORS***
(三皇 五帝)

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Three Sovereigns

FU XI

Fuxi (/fuˈʃi/; Chinese: 伏羲) or Fu Xi, also romanized as Fu-hsi, is a culture hero in Chinese legend and mythology, credited (along with his sister Nü Wa) with creating humanity and the invention of hunting, fishing and cooking as well as the Cangjie system of writing Chinese characters c. 12,000 BC. He was also known as Paoxi (庖犧, 庖牺), also romanized as Pao-hsi. Fu Xi was counted as the first of the Three Sovereigns at the beginning of the Chinese dynastic period.

Origin

Pangu was said to be the creation god in Chinese mythology. He was a giant sleeping in an egg of chaos. As he awoke, he stood up and divided the sky and the earth. Pangu then died after standing up, and his body turned into rivers, mountains, plants, animals, and everything else in the world, among which is a powerful being known as **Hua Hsu**. Hua Hsu gave birth to a twin brother and sister, Fu Xi and Nü Wa. Fu Xi and Nü Wa are said to be creatures that have faces of human and bodies of snakes.

Fu Xi was known as the "original human" (although technically speaking he was not a human) and he was also said to be was born on the lower-middle reaches of the Yellow River in a place called **Chengji** (possibly modern **Lantian, Shaanxi** province or **Tianshui, Gansu** province).

In reality, many Chinese people believe[citation needed] that Hua Hsu was a leader during the matriarchal society (ca. 2,600 BCE) as early Chinese developed language skill while Fu Xi and Nü Wa were leaders in the early patriarchal society (ca. 2,600 BCE) while Chinese began the marriage rituals.

Creation legend

According to the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, Fu Xi and Nü Wa were the original human who live on the mythological **Kunlun** Mountain (today's **Huashan**). One day they set up two separated piles of fire, and the fire eventually became one. Under the fire they decided to become husband and wife. Fu Xi and Nü Wa used clay to create off springs, and with the divine power they made the clay figures come alive. These clay figures were the earliest human beings.

Fu Xi and Nü Wa were usually recognized by Chinese as two of the Three Emperors in the early patriarchal society in China (ca. 2,600 BCE.), based on the myth about Fu Xi establishing marriage ritual in his tribe. The creation of human beings was a symbolic story of having a larger family structure that included the figure of a father.

Social importance

On one of the columns of the Fu Xi Temple in **Gansu** Province, the following couplet describes Fu Xi's importance: "Among the three primogenitors of **Huaxia** civilization, Fu Xi in **Huaiyang** Country ranks first." During the time of his predecessor Nü Wa (who, according to some sources, was also his wife and/or sister), society was matriarchal.

In the beginning there was as yet no moral or social order. Men knew their mothers only, not their fathers. When hungry, they searched for food; when satisfied, they threw away the remnants. They devoured their food hide and hair, drank the blood, and clad themselves in skins and rushes.

Then came Fu Xi and looked upward and contemplated the images in the heavens, and looked downward and contemplated the occurrences on earth. He united man and wife, regulated the five stages of change, and laid down the laws of humanity. He devised the eight trigrams, in order to gain mastery over the world.

Ban Gu, Baihu tongyi

Fu Xi taught his subjects to cook, to fish with nets, and to hunt with weapons made of bone, wood, or bamboo. He instituted marriage and offered the first open-air sacrifices to heaven. A stone tablet, dated 160 CE, shows Fu Xi with Nü Wa.

Traditionally, Fu Xi is considered the originator of the **I Ching** (also known as the Yi Jing or Zhou Yi), which work is attributed to his reading of the He Map (or the Yellow River Map).

According to this tradition, Fu Xi had the arrangement of the trigrams (八卦 bāguà) of the I Ching revealed to him in the markings on the back of a mythical dragon horse (sometimes said to be a tortoise) that emerged from the **Luo** River. This arrangement precedes the compilation of the I Ching during the Zhou dynasty. This discovery is said to have been the origin of calligraphy. Fu Xi is also credited with the invention of the **Gugin** musical instrument, though credit for this is also given to **Shennong** and **Yellow Emperor**.

The Figurists viewed Fuxi as Enoch, the biblical patriarch.

SHENNONG

Shennong, literally Divine Farmer, also known as the Emperor of the Five Grains (**Wǔgǔ Xiāndì**), is a mythical sage ruler of prehistoric China.

Shennong has at times been counted amongst the Three Sovereigns (also known as "Three Emperors"), a group of mythological and sage-like emperors said to have lived some 4,500 years ago. Shennong has been thought to have taught the ancient Chinese not only their practices of agriculture, but also the use of herbal drugs.

Shennong is among the group of variously named heroic persons and deities who have been traditionally given credit for various inventions: these include the hoe, plow (both *leisi* style and the plowshare), axe, digging wells, agricultural irrigation, preserving stored seeds by using boiled horse urine, the weekly farmers market, the Chinese calendar (especially the division into the **24 jieqi** or solar terms), and to have refined the therapeutic understanding of taking pulse measurements, acupuncture, and moxibustion, and to have instituted the harvest thanksgiving ceremony (Zhaji Sacrificial Rite, later known as the **Laji** Rite).

Shennong can also be taken to refer to his people, the Shennong-shi (t 神農氏, s 神农氏, p Shénnóngshì) or "Clan of Shennong".

Since *shì* can mean both "clan" and "surname" and serve as a masculine honorific like "mister" or "sir", it is sometimes used in reference to his people, sometimes in reference to the individual.

Mythology

In Chinese mythology Shennong, besides having taught humans the use of the plow together with other aspects of basic agriculture, the use of medicinal plants, and having been a god of the burning wind (perhaps in some relationship to the **Yan Emperor** mythos and/or slash-and-burn agriculture, in which the ash produced by fire fertilizes the fields), was sometimes said to be a progenitor to, or to have had appointed as one of his ministers, Chi You; and like him, they were both ox-headed, sharp-horned, bronze-four headed, and iron-skulled. One difference between mythology and science is exemplified in Chinese mythology: Shennong and Yellow Emperor were supposedly friends and fellow scholars, despite the 500 years or seventeen or eighteen generations between the first Shennong and Yellow Emperor; and, that together they shared the alchemical secrets of medicine, immortality, and making gold.

According to the eighth century AD historian **Sima Zhen's** commentary to the second century BC *Shiji* (or, *Records of the Grand Historian*), Shennong is a kinsman of the Yellow Emperor and is said to be an ancestor, or a patriarch, of the ancient forebears of the Chinese. The Han Chinese regarded them both as their joint ancestors.

Popular religion

According to some versions of the myths about Shennong, he eventually died as a result of his researches into the properties of plants by experimenting upon his own body, after, in one of his tests, he ate the yellow flower of a weed that caused his intestines to rupture before he had time to swallow his antidotal tea: having thus given his life for humanity, he has since received special honor though his worship as the Medicine King.

*The sacrifice of cows or oxen to Shennong in his various manifestations is never at all appropriate; instead pigs and sheep are acceptable. Fireworks and incense may also be used, especially at the appearance of his statue on his birthday, **lunar April 26**, according to popular tradition. Under his various names, Shennong is the patron deity especially of farmers, rice traders, and practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Many temples and other places dedicated to his commemoration exist.*

Historicity

*Reliable information on the history of China before the 13th century BC can only come from archaeological evidence, because China's first established written system on a durable medium, the oracle bone script, did not exist until then. Thus the concrete existence of even the **Xia** dynasty - said to be the successor to Shennong - is yet to be proven, despite efforts by Chinese archaeologists to link that dynasty with Bronze Age Erlitou archaeological sites.*

However, Shennong, both the individual and the clan, are very important, in the history of culture—especially in regards to mythology and popular culture. Indeed, Shennong figures extensively in historical literature.

Shennong in literature

Sima Qian mentions that the rulers directly preceding the Yellow Emperor were of the house (or societal group) of Shennong.

Sima Zhen, who added a prologue for the **Shiji**, said his surname was **Jiang (姜)**, and proceeded to list his successors. An older and more famous reference is in the *Huainanzi*; it tells how, prior to Shennong, people were sickly, wanting, starved and diseased; but he then taught them agriculture, which he himself had researched, eating hundreds of plants — and even consuming seventy poisons in one day.

Shennong also features in the book popularly known in English as **I Ching**.

Here, he is referenced as coming to power after the end of the house (or reign) of Paoxi (Fu Xi), also inventing a bent-wood plow, a cut-wood rake, teaching these skills to others, and establishing a noonday market.

Another reference is in the **Lüshi Chunqiu**, mentioning some violence with regard to the rise of the Shennong house, and that their power lasted seventeen generations.

The **Shénnóng Běncǎo Jīng** is a book on agriculture and medicinal plants, attributed to Shennong. Research suggests that it is a compilation of oral traditions, written between about 200 and 250 AD.

Popular culture

As noted above, Shennong is said in the **Huainanzi** to have tasted hundreds of herbs to test their medical value. The most well-known work attributed to Shennong is *The Divine Farmer's Herb-Root Classic* (simplified Chinese: 神农本草经; traditional Chinese: 神農本草經; pinyin: Shénnóng Běncǎo Jīng; Wade–Giles:

Shen2-nung2 Pen3-ts'ao3 Ching1), first compiled some time during the end of the Western Han Dynasty — several thousand years after Shennong might have existed. This work lists the various medicinal herbs, such as lingzhi, that were discovered by Shennong and given grade and rarity ratings.

It is considered to be the earliest Chinese pharmacopoeia, and includes 365 medicines derived from minerals, plants, and animals. Shennong is credited with identifying hundreds of medical (and poisonous) herbs by personally testing their properties, which was crucial to the development of Traditional Chinese medicine. Legend holds that Shennong had a transparent body, and thus could see the effects of different plants and herbs on himself.

Tea, which acts as an antidote against the poisonous effects of some seventy herbs, is also said to have been his discovery. Shennong first tasted it, traditionally in ca. 2437 BC, from tea leaves on burning tea twigs, after they were carried up from the fire by the hot air, landing in his cauldron of boiling water. Shennong is venerated as the Father of Chinese medicine. He is also believed to have introduced the technique of acupuncture.

Shennong is said to have played a part in the creation of the **Guqin**, together with Fuxi and the Yellow Emperor. Scholarly works mention that the paternal family of famous Song Dynasty General **Yue Fei** traced their origins back to Shennong.

Places

*Shennong is associated with certain geographic localities including Shennongjia, in **Hubei**, where the rattan ladder which he used to climb the local mountain range is supposed to have transformed into a vast forest. The Shennong Stream flows from here into the **Yangtze** River.*

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HUANG DI

The Yellow Emperor or About this sound Huángdì, formerly Romanized as Huang-ti and Hwang-ti, is one of the legendary Chinese sovereigns and culture heroes included among the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors.

*Tradition holds that Huangdi reigned from 2697 to 2597 or 2698 to 2598 BC. Huangdi's cult was particularly prominent in the late Warring States and early Han period, when he was portrayed as the originator of the centralized state, a cosmic ruler, and a patron of esoteric arts. Traditionally credited with numerous inventions and innovations, the Yellow Emperor is now regarded as the initiator of Chinese civilization, and said to be the ancestor of all **Huaxia** Chinese.*

Historicity

*The Chinese historian **Sima Qian** – and much Chinese historiography following him – considered the Yellow Emperor to be a more historical figure than earlier legendary figures such as Fu Xi, Nüwa, and the Yan emperor. His *Records of the Grand Historian* begins with the Yellow Emperor, while passing over the others.*

*Throughout most of Chinese history, the Yellow Emperor and the other ancient sages were considered to be real historical figures. Their historicity started to be questioned in the 1920s by historians like **Gu Jiegang**, one of the founders of the Doubting Antiquity School in China. In their attempts to prove that the earliest figures of Chinese history were mythological, Gu and his followers argued that these ancient sages were originally gods who were later depicted as humans by the rationalist intellectuals of the Warring States period.*

***Yang Kuan**, a member of the same historiographical current, noted that only in the Warring States period had the Yellow Emperor started to be described as the first ruler of China. Yang thus argued that Huangdi was a later transformation of Shangdi, the supreme god of the Shang pantheon.*

Also in the 1920s, French scholars Henri Maspero and Marcel Granet published critical studies of China's accounts of high antiquity.

*In his *Danses et légendes de la Chine ancienne* ["Dances and legends of ancient China", for example, Granet argued that these tales were "historicized legends" that said more about the time when they were written than about the time they purported to describe.*

Most scholars now agree that the Yellow Emperor originated in tales of the gods which later presented the character as a human.

***K.C. Chang** sees Huangdi and other cultural heroes as "ancient religious figures" who were "euhemerized" in the late Warring States and Han periods*

*Historian of ancient China, **Mark Edward Lewis** speaks of the Yellow Emperor's "earlier nature as a god", whereas*

***Roel Sterckx**, a professor at University of Cambridge, calls Huangdi a "legendary cultural hero".*

Names

Clan names

The Yellow Emperor has been referred to as **Xuanyan-shi** (s 軒轅氏, t 軒轅氏, p Xuānyuán-shì) and Youxiong-shi (c 有熊氏, p Yǒuxióng-shì).

Third-century scholar **Huangfu Mi** commented that **Xuanyuan** was the name of a hill where Huangdi had lived and that he later took as a name. **Qing**-dynasty commentator **Liang Yusheng** (梁玉繩; 1745–1819) argued instead that the hill was named after the Yellow Emperor rather than the opposite.

According to British Sinologist **Herbert Allen Giles** (1845–1935); Youxiong was a name taken from Huangdi's hereditary principality; Giles also cited sources saying that Xuanyuan was the name of a village where the Yellow Emperor had lived.

William Nienhauser, a modern translator of the *Shiji*, explains that Huangdi was originally the head of the Youxiong Clan, which lived near what is now **Xinzheng** in **Henan**.

"The Yellow Emperor"

In the late Warring States period, the Yellow Emperor was integrated into the cosmological scheme of the Five Phases, in which the color yellow represents earth, dragons, and the center. The correlation of the colours in association with different dynasties was mentioned in the **Lüshi Chunqiu** (late 3rd century BC), where the Yellow Emperor's reign was seen to be governed by earth.

Origin and development of the myth

Origins

The origin of Huangdi's legend is unclear, but historians have formulated several hypotheses about it.

Yang Kuan, a member of the Doubting Antiquity School (1920s–40s), argued that the Yellow Emperor was derived from Shangdi, the highest god of the **Shang** dynasty.

Yang's view is based on the series Shangdi 上帝 Huang Shangdi 皇上帝 Huangdi 皇帝 Huangdi 黃帝, in which he claims that huang 黃 ("yellow") either was a graphic variant of huang 皇 ("august") or was used as a taboo character for the latter.

Yang's view has been criticized by **Mitarai Masaru** and by **Michael Puett**.

Historian **Mark Edward Lewis** agrees that huang 黃 and huang 皇 were often interchangeable, but, disagreeing with Yang, he claims that huang meaning "yellow" appeared first. Based on what he admits is a "novel etymology" likening huang 黃 to the phonetically close wang 𤣥 (the "burned shaman" in Shang rainmaking rituals), Lewis suggests that "Huang" in the Yellow Emperor's title might originally have meant "rainmaking shaman" or "rainmaking ritual." Citing late Warring States and early Han versions of Huangdi's myth, he further argues that the figure of the Yellow Emperor originated in ancient rain-making rituals in which the Yellow Emperor represented the power of rain and clouds, whereas his mythical rival **Chi You** (or **Yandi**) stood for fire and drought.

Also disagreeing with Yang Kuan's hypothesis, **Sarah Allan** finds it unlikely that such a popular myth as the Yellow Emperor's could have come from a taboo character.

She argues instead that pre-Shang "'history'," including the story of the Yellow Emperor, "can all be understood as a later transformation and systematization of Shang myth."

In her view, Huangdi was originally an unnamed "lord of the underworld" (or the "Yellow Springs"), the mythological counterpart of the Shang sky deity Shangdi. At the time, Shang rulers claimed that their mythical ancestors, identified with "the [ten] suns, birds, east, life, [and] the Lord on High" (i.e., Shangdi), had defeated an earlier people associated with "the underworld, dragons, west."

After the Zhou overthrew the Shang in the eleventh century BC, Zhou leaders reinterpreted Shang myths as meaning that the Shang had vanquished a real political dynasty, which was eventually named the Xia dynasty. By Han times – as seen in Sima Qian's account in the *Shiji* – the Yellow Emperor, who as lord of the underworld had been symbolically linked to the Xia, had become a historical ruler whose descendants were thought to have founded the Xia.

The Yellow Emperor in pre-imperial times

Accounts of the Yellow Emperor started to appear in Chinese texts in the Warring States period. "The most ancient extant reference" to Huangdi is an inscription on a bronze vessel made in the first half of the fourth century BC by the royal family of the state of Qi.

Michael Puett writes that this was one of several references to the Yellow Emperor in the fourth and third centuries BC within accounts of the creation of the state.

Elements of Huangdi's myth

Early years

According to **Huangfu Mi** (215–282), the Yellow Emperor was born in **Shou Qiu** ("Longevity Hill"), which is today on the outskirts of the city of **Qufu** in **Shandong**.

Early on, he lived with his tribe in the northwest near the **Ji** River (thought to be the Fen River in Shanxi[37]), later migrating to **Zhuolu** in modern-day **Hebei**.

He then became a farmer and tamed six different special beasts:

The **Bear** (熊), the **Brown Bear** (s 黑, t 熊), the **Big** (貔) and **Xiū** (貅) which later combined to form the mythical **Pixiu**, the ferocious **Chū** (獬), and the **Tiger** (虎).

From this, **Ye Shuxian** associated the Yellow Emperor with bear legends common across northeast Asia people as well as the **Dangun** legend.

The Yellow Emperor and **The Yan emperor** were both leaders of a tribe or a combination of two tribes near the Yellow River, in an era that modern Chinese history books often refer to as "primitive society."

The Yan emperor hailed from a different area around the **Jiang** River (thought to be the modern **Wei**). Both emperors lived in a time of warfare.

The Yan emperor proving unable to control the disorder within his realm, the Yellow Emperor took up arms to establish his domination over various warring factions.

Achievements

In traditional Chinese accounts, the Yellow Emperor is credited with improving the livelihood of the nomadic hunters of his tribe. He teaches them how to build shelters, tame wild animals, and grow the five Chinese cereals, although other accounts credit Shennong with the last. He invents carts, boats, and clothing.

Other inventions credited to the emperor include the Chinese **Diadem (冠冕)**, throne rooms (宫室), the bow sling, early Chinese astronomy, the Chinese calendar, math calculations, code of sound laws (音律), and **Cuju**, an early Chinese version of football. He is also sometimes said to have been partially responsible for the invention of the **Guqin** zither, although others credit the Yan emperor with inventing instruments for **Ling Lun's** compositions.

In traditional accounts, he also goads the historian **Cangjie** into creating the first Chinese character writing system, the Oracle bone script, and his principal wife **Leizu** invents sericulture and teaches his people how to weave silk and dye clothes.

At one point in his reign the Yellow Emperor allegedly visited the mythical East sea and met a talking beast called the **Bai Ze** who taught him the knowledge of all supernatural creatures.

This beast explained to him there were 11,522 (or 1,522) kinds of supernatural creatures.

Battles

According to traditional accounts, the Yan emperor meets the force of the "**Nine Li**" (九黎) under their bronze-headed leader, **Chi You**, and his 81 horned and four-eyed brothers and suffers a decisive defeat.

He flees to **Zhuolu** and begs the Yellow Emperor for help.

During the ensuing **Battle of Zhuolu** the Yellow Emperor employs his tamed animals and Chi You darkens the sky by breathing out a thick fog. This leads the emperor to develop the south-pointing chariot, which he uses to lead his army out of the miasma.

He next calls upon the drought demon **Nuba** to dispel **Chi You's** storm. He then destroys the **Nine Li** and defeats **Chi You** before falling out with the Yan emperor, defeating him at **Banquan** and replacing him as the primary ruler.

Death

*The Yellow Emperor was said to have lived for over a hundred years before meeting a **Phoenix** and a **Qilin** and then dying.*

*Two tombs were built in **Shaanxi** within the Mausoleum of the Yellow Emperor, in addition to others in **Henan, Hebei** and **Gansu**.*

Modern-day Chinese people sometimes refer to themselves as the "Descendants of Yan and Yellow Emperor", although non-Han minority groups in China may have their own myths or not count as descendants of the emperor.

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Family and descendants

According to the Mausoleum of the Yellow Emperor in modern-day **Shaanxi**, the Yellow Emperor shares ancestry with that of a Central Plains race that went by the name **Ji** from their position along the **Ji** River.

The Yellow Emperor's father was **Shaodian (少典)** and his mother was **Fu Pao (附寶)**.

The Yellow Emperor had a total of four wives :

His first wife **Leizu of Xiling** bore him two sons.

His other three wives were his second wife **Fenglei (封嫫)**, third wife **Tongyu (彤魚)** and fourth wife **Momu (嫫母)**.

The emperor had a total of 25 sons, 14 of whom began their own surnames and clans.

The oldest was **Shaohao** or **Xuanxiao**, who lived in **Qingyang** by the **Yangtze** River.

Changyi, the youngest, lived by the **Ruo** River (若水).

When the Yellow Emperor died, he was succeeded by **Changyi's** son, **Zhuanxu**.

Later sources claimed that several emperors and four subsequent dynasties descended from the Yellow Emperor: Other dynasties, besides these first four, also claimed descent from the Yellow Emperor :

Emperors **Zhuanxu, Ku, Yao, and Shun**

Xia dynasty

Shang dynasty

Zhou dynasty

Qin dynasty

Han dynasty

Cao Wei

Song dynasty

Sima Qian, in his *Records of the Grand Historian*, (史記 [traditional]/史记 [simplified]), tells us that :

Emperor **Wen** of **Han's** mother was consort **Bo**, (薄太后, later Empress **Dowager Bo**, [薄太后], or Empress **Dowager Xiaowen**, [孝文太后]); and that she was the **illegitimate daughter** of **Gentleman Bo**, (薄翁), of **Wu** County, (吳縣), in modern **Suzhou, Jiangsu**; and a Lady **Wei**, a "Princess" of the "Warring-States" Kingdom of **Wei**, which line was a branch of the **Zhou** dynasty.

All future Han Emperors were descended from **Wendi**.

Several Han Princesses were sent to be consorts of the **Chanyu** of the **Hsiung-nus**; so that, at the fall of the **Han**, the then **Chanyu** of the **Hsiung-nu** claimed the Chinese throne due to these marriages.

According to the **Wei Shu** and **Tung Pa**, the **Cao** family of **Cao Wei** were descended from **Huangdi** via Emperor **Zhuanxu**, from which the **Cao** family originated.

They were of the same lineage as to Emperor **Shun**.

Another account says that the **Cao** family was descended from Emperor **Shun**.

This account was attacked by **Chiang Chi** who claimed it was people of the **Tian** 田 surname who were descended from **Shun** and not the **Cao**. He also claimed (**Gui**) **Kuei** 媿 was **Shun's** family name.

During the reign of **Emperor Zhenzong** Song Emperors claimed **Huangdi** as an ancestor.

Gun, Yu, Zhuanxu, Zhong, Li, Shujun, and Yuqiang are various emperors, gods, and heroes whose ancestor was **Huangdi**.

The **Huantou, Miaomin, and Quanrong** peoples were said to be descended from **Huangdi**.

Claims of descent

During the **Tang** dynasty, the Yellow Emperor, symbolic as the ancestor of the **Han** Chinese and founder of Chinese civilization, was also claimed by various other rulers who were not Han Chinese to be their ancestors, in order to connect themselves to the **Tang**. "Prestige" for the individual and "status" for their country was the goal of those non-Han who made claims of descent from these prominent Han figures.

Claiming descent from Huangdi and the other five emperors was set during the **Western Han dynasty** in **Sima Qian's** time.

The claim that Shennong and Huangdi were ancestors of the Chinese was written about during **Tang** and **Song**. 14 out of 25 sons of Huangdi received twelve different family names.

Shennong and Huangdi were regarded as the ancestor for the majority of Chinese surnames.

The practice of Chinese claiming Huangdi as an ancestor was well established in **Tang** and **Song** China, with many Chinese families writing about their ancestry from Huangdi's sons and great-grandsons, Emperor **Shun**, and Emperor **Yao**.

Emperor **Yao** was also claimed to be the ancestor of the Han dynasty Emperor **Liu Bang**.

Most Chinese noble families claimed descent from Huangdi.

Most Chinese genealogies trace their family ultimately to Huangdi.

New families were founded by the younger sons of older families. When compared together, different Chinese genealogies frequently confirm these founding events by younger sons.

Lynn Pan claims that descent from Huangdi is commonly claimed by some **overseas Chinese clans**.

Many Chinese clans in overseas areas will have genealogies displaying their descent from Huangdi with their different surnames being explained by name changes.

Huangdi granted 14 of his 25 sons different family names, These 14 family names are from which all other Chinese family names are traced to.

Both many overseas Chinese and Chinese in China use genealogies which show the Huangdi as their ancestor to reinforce their being Chinese.

In 1963 during the **Qingming** festival **Huang Zhenduo** wrote the genealogy of the **Huang Clan**.

He attacked the **Taiping's**, **Yuan Shikai**, **Chiang Kai-shek**, the Japanese, and the Communists in the preface of his genealogy, all of whom virtually destroyed China and destroyed ancient historic genealogies of various Chinese families.

He lamented the destruction and despaired at how people no longer knew their ancestors.

The genealogist **Huang Zhenduo** claimed Huangdi's six generation descendants as the ancestors of the **Huang** lineage of the town **Huang Cun**.

Their surname **Huang** was derived from the **Huang** region, where they quarreled with each other.

Various members of generations of the **Huang** family had important posts in government under **King Wu of Zhou**, under whom **Huang Liangze** served, and the governor of **Xin'an (Huizhou)** in 322 AD, was **Huang Li** of **Huang Dun** town.

This town was near **Huang Cun**.

One of the **Huang's** had no children so he adopted **Cheng Keyuan**, and **Cheng Keyuan** became **Huang Keyuan** and started the new Huang clan lineage from which the present day Huang clan descended.

The Yu (Yee) family of **Zhangwan** village, **Xinhui** district, **Guangdong** claimed descent from Huangdi's son **Xuan xiao**.

Emperor **Shun's** agriculture minister, Duke **Qi**, was of one of the originally 15th generations of the family.

The family adopted the last name **Yu** 30 generations after that.

The Kings of **Chin** and **Jin** honored their ancestor **You Yu**. **You** moved to **Shandong**, he was originally from the northern China plain.

Another ancestor named **Yu Rui** moved near the **Lo** river in **Shaanxi** province.

He became a censor for the State of **Qin**. The family moved into **Guangdong** during the Ten Kingdoms and five dynasties.

Societal influence

Imperial era

*The Yellow Emperor was credited with an enormous number of cultural legacies and esoteric teachings. While Taoism is often regarded in the West as arising from **Laozi**, Chinese Taoists claim the Yellow Emperor formulated many of their precepts.*

*In addition the texts mentioned above, he was also credited with composing the Four Classics of the Yellow Emperor, the Yellow Emperor's Hidden Talisman Classic, and the "Yellow Emperor's Four Seasons Poem" included in the **Tung Shing** fortune-telling almanac.*

The Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon, which presents the doctrinal basis of traditional Chinese medicine, was also named after him.

*"**Xuanyuan 12**" (s 轩辕十二, t 軒轅十二) is also the Chinese name for **Gamma Leonis**. In the Hall of Supreme Harmony in **Beijing's Forbidden City**, there is also a mirror called the "**Xuanyuan Mirror**".*

Twentieth century

The Yellow Emperor became a powerful national symbol in the last decade of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) and remained dominant in Chinese nationalist discourse throughout the Chinese Republican period (1911–49). The early twentieth century is also when the Yellow Emperor was first referred to as the ancestor of all Chinese.

Late Qing

Starting in 1903, radical publications started using the projected date of his birth as the first year of the Chinese calendar.

Intellectuals like **Liu Shipei** (1884–1919) found this practice necessary in order to "preserve the [Han] race" (**baozhong** 保種) from both **Manchu** dominance and foreign encroachment.

Anti-Manchu revolutionaries like **Chen Tianhua** (1875–1905), **Zou Rong** (1885–1905), and **Zhang Binglin** (1868–1936) tried to foster the racial consciousness they thought was missing from their **Compatriots**, and thus depicted the **Manchus** as **racially inferior barbarians** who were unfit to rule over Han Chinese.

Chen's widely circulated pamphlets claimed that the "**Han race**" formed one big family descended from the Yellow Emperor.

The first issue (Nov. 1905) of the **Minbao** 民報 ("People's Journal"), which was founded in **Tokyo** by revolutionaries of the **Tongmenghui**, featured the Yellow Emperor on its cover and called Huangdi "the first great nationalist of the world."

It was one of several nationalist magazines that featured the Yellow Emperor on their cover in the early twentieth century. The fact that Huangdi meant "yellow" emperor also served to buttress the theory that he was the originator of the "**Yellow Race**".

Many historians interpret this sudden popularity of the Yellow Emperor as a reaction to the theories of French scholar **Albert Terrien de Lacouperie** (1845–94), who in a book called *The Western Origin of the Early Chinese Civilization*, from 2300 B.C. to 200 A.D. (1892) had claimed that Chinese civilization had been founded about 4200 years earlier by **Mesopotamian immigrants**.

Lacouperie's "Sino-Babylonianism" posited that Huangdi was a Mesopotamian tribal leader who had led a massive migration of his people into China around 2300 BC and founded what later became Chinese civilization.

European Sinologists quickly rejected these theories, but in 1900 two Japanese historians, **Shirakawa Jirō** and **Kokubu Tanenori**, omitted these criticisms and published a long summary that presented **Lacouperie's** views as the most advanced Western scholarship on China.

Chinese scholars were quickly attracted by "the historicization of Chinese mythology" that the two Japanese authors advocated.

Anti-Manchu intellectuals and activists who searched for China's "**National Essence**" (**guocui** 國粹) adapted **Sino-Babylonianism** to their needs.

Zhang Binglin explained Huangdi's battle with **Chi You** as a conflict opposing **The Newly Arrived Civilized Mesopotamians** to backward local tribes, a battle that transformed China into one of the most civilized places in the world.

Zhang's reinterpretation of **Sima Qian's** account "underscored the need to recover the glory of early China."

Liu Shipei also presented these early times as the golden age of Chinese civilization. In addition to tying the Chinese to an ancient center of human civilization in **Mesopotamia**, **Lacouperie's** theories suggested that China should be ruled by the descendants of Huangdi. In a controversial essay called *History of the Yellow Race* (**Huangshi** 黃史), which was published serially from 1905 to 1908, **Huang Jie** (黃節, 1873–1935) claimed that the Han race was the true master of China because it was descended from the Yellow Emperor. Reinforced by the values of filial piety and the Chinese patrilineal clan, the racial vision defended by **Huang** and others turned vengeance against the **Manchus** into a duty owed to one's ancestors.

Republican period

The Yellow Emperor continued to be revered after the **Xinhai** Revolution of 1911, which overthrew the **Qing** dynasty.

In 1912, for instance, **Banknotes** carrying Huangdi's effigy were issued by the new Republican government. After 1911, however, the Yellow Emperor as national symbol changed from first progenitor of the **Han** race to ancestor of China's entire multi-ethnic population. Under the ideology of the Five Races in Unity, Huangdi became the common ancestor of the **Han**, the **Manchus**, the **Mongols**, the **Tibetans**, and the **Hui Muslims**, who were said to form the **Zhonghua minzu**, a broadly understood Chinese nation.

Sixteen state ceremonies were held between 1911 and 1949 to Huangdi as the "founding ancestor of the Chinese nation" (**中華民族始祖**) and even "the founding ancestor of human civilization" (**人文始祖**).

Modern significance

The Cult of The Yellow Emperor was forbidden in the People's Republic of China until the end of the Cultural Revolution.

The prohibition was halted during the 1980s when the government reversed itself and resurrected the "Yellow Emperor cult".

Starting in the 1980s, the cult was revived and phrases relating to the "Descendants of **Yan** and **Huang**" were sometimes used by the Chinese state when referring to people of Chinese descent.

In 1984, for example, **Deng Xiaoping** argued for Chinese reunification saying :

"Taiwan is rooted in the hearts of the descendants of the Yellow Emperor,"

Whereas in 1986 the **PRC** acclaimed the Chinese-American astronaut **Taylor Wang** as the first of the Yellow Emperor's descendants to travel in space.

In the first half of the 1980s, the Party had internally debated whether this usage would make ethnic minorities feel excluded.

After consulting experts from Beijing University, the Chinese Academy of Social Science, and the Central Nationalities Institute, the Central Propaganda Department recommended on March 27, 1985, that the Party speak of the **Zhonghua Minzu** – the "Chinese nation" broadly defined – in official statements, but that the phrase "sons and grand-sons of **Yandi** and the **Yellow Emperor**" could be used in informal statements by party leaders and in "relations with **Hong Kong** and **Taiwanese** compatriots and overseas Chinese compatriots".

After retreating to **Taiwan** in late 1949 at the end of the Chinese Civil War, **Chiang Kai-shek** ruled that the Republic of China would keep paying homage to the Yellow Emperor on April 4, the National Tomb Sweeping Day, but neither he nor the three presidents that succeeded him ever paid homage in person.

In 2009 President **Ma Ying-jeou** presided over these rites in person and proclaimed that both Chinese culture and common descent from the Yellow Emperor united people from Taiwan and the mainland.

Later the same year, **Lien Chan** – a former Vice President of the Republic of China who is now Honorary Chairman of the **Kuomintang** – and his wife **Lien Fang Yu** paid homage at the Mausoleum of the Yellow Emperor in **Huangling, Yan'an**, in mainland China.

Gay studies researcher **Louis Crompton** has cited **Ji Yun's** report in his popular Notes from the **Yuewei Hermitage** (1800), that some claimed the Yellow Emperor was the first Chinese to take male bedmates, a claim that **Ji Yun** dismissed. **Ji Yun** argued that this was probably a false attribution.

Traditional dates

Although the traditional Chinese calendar did not mark years continuously, some Han-dynasty astronomers tried to determine the years of the life and reign of the Yellow Emperor.

*In 78 BC, under the reign of Emperor **Zhao**, an official called **Zhang Shouwang** (張壽望) calculated that 6,000 years had passed since the time of Huangdi; the court refused his proposal for reform, countering that only 3,629 years had elapsed.*

*In the prolepsis **Julian** calendar, the court's calculations would have placed the Yellow Emperor in the late 38th century BC rather than in the 27th century BC that is conventional nowadays.*

*During their missions in China in the seventeenth century, the **Jesuits** tried to determine what year should be considered the epoch of the Chinese calendar.*

*In his **Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima** (first published in Munich in 1658), **Martino Martini** (1614–1661) dated the royal ascension of Huangdi to 2697 BC, but started the Chinese calendar with the reign of **Fuxi**, which he claimed started in 2952 BC.*

***Philippe Couplet's** (1623–1693) "Chronological table of Chinese monarchs" (**Tabula Chronologica Monarchiae Sinicae**; 1686) also gave the same date for the Yellow Emperor.*

*The **Jesuits'** dates provoked great interest in Europe, where they were used for comparisons with Biblical chronology.*

*Modern Chinese chronology has generally accepted **Martini's** dates, except that it usually places the reign of Huangdi in 2698 BC and omits Huangdi's predecessors Fuxi and Shennong, who are considered "too legendary to include."*

Starting in 1903, radical publications started using the projected date of birth of the Yellow Emperor as the first year of the Chinese calendar.

Different newspapers and magazines proposed different dates. **Jiangsu**, for example counted 1905 as year 4396 (making 2491 BC the first year of the Chinese calendar), whereas the **Minbao** (the organ of the **Tongmenghui**) reckoned 1905 as 4603 (first year: 2698 BC).

Liu Shipai (劉師培, 1884–1919) created the Yellow Emperor Calendar, now widely used, to show the unbroken continuity of the Han race and Han culture from earliest times.

There is no evidence that this calendar was used before the 20th century. **Liu's** calendar started with the birth of the Yellow Emperor, which was reckoned to be 2711 BC.

When **Sun Yat-sen** declared the foundation of the Republic of China on January 2, 1912, he decreed that this was the 12th day of the 11th month of year 4609 (epoch: 2698 BC), but that the state would now be using the solar calendar and count 1912 as the first year of the Republic.

Chronological tables published in the 1938 edition of the **Cihai** (辭海) dictionary followed **Sun Yat-Sen** in using 2698 as the year of Huangdi's accession; this chronology is now "widely reproduced, with little variation."

Helmer Aslaksen, a mathematician who teaches at the National University of **Singapore** and specializes in the Chinese calendar, explains that those who use 2698 BC as a first year probably do so because they want to have "a year 0 as the starting point", or because "they assume that the Yellow Emperor started his year with the Winter solstice of 2698 BC", hence the difference with the year 2697 BC calculated by the **Jesuits**.

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five Emperors

SHAO HAO

Shaohao (少昊), also known as **Shao Hao**, **Jin Tian** or **Xuanxiao**, was a legendary Chinese sovereign who reigned c. 2600 BC. Shaohao is usually identified as a son of the Yellow Emperor. According to some traditions (for example the Book of Documents), he is a member of the Five Emperors.

The historicity of Shaohao is controversial. The Doubting Antiquity School of historians represented by **Gu Jiegang** posit that Shaohao was added to the orthodox legendary succession by **Liu Xin** as part of a political campaign of revisions to ancient texts around the 1st century AD.

Orthodox legend

The usually accepted version of his life, the provenance of which can only be reliably traced to the Han Dynasty from the 1st century AD onwards, posits that Shaohao is a son of the Yellow Emperor. He was the leader of the **Dongyi**, where he shifted their capital to **Qufu, Shandong**. Ruling for eighty-four years, he was succeeded by his nephew **Zhuanxu**.

According to the earlier Records of the Grand Historian, there was no emperor (Chinese: 帝) between the Yellow Emperor and Zhuanxu; however, Shaohao is mentioned as a person living between the two who was fretting over a dishonest son.

He is usually identified as **Xuanxiao (玄嚣)**, the oldest son of the Yellow Emperor found earlier in the text. That would identify the dishonest son as **Jiaoji (蛟极)**, Xuanxiao's only known offspring, who was also passed over as emperor. **Jiaoji's** son, **Ku**, and grandsons (**Zhi** and **Yao**) did become emperors though.

Shaohao's tomb, most likely built during the **Song** dynasty, is traditionally located in present-day **Jiuxian** ("old prefecture") village, on the eastern outskirts of **Qufu**.

The tomb enclosure also includes a pyramidal monument called **Shou Qiu**, which according to legend was the birthplace of the Yellow Emperor.

Legend with alternative origin

A different legend posits that Shaohao was not the Yellow Emperor's son.

This legend says that his mother, a weaver goddess, was a beautiful fairy named **Huang'e** who fell in love with the planet **Venus** while drifting along the Milky Way.

The two enjoyed many intimate nights together on her raft and they created a son. She soon gave birth to Shaohao, who grew up to be a handsome young man with a lot of potential.

His great uncle, the Yellow Emperor, was so impressed with him that he named him : **God of The Western Heavens**.

The myth says that Shaohao created a kingdom in the five mountains of the Eastern Paradise that was inhabited by different types of birds.

As the ruler of this bureaucratic land, he captured the identity of a Vulture.

Other birds worked below him, such as a : Phoenix as his Lord Chancellor, a Hawk that delegated the law, and a Pigeon that was in charge of education.

He chose the four seasons of the year to watch over the remaining birds.

Although his kingdom was successful for many years, he moved back to the west and left his kingdom of birds to his son **Chong**. With a different son, **Ru Shou**, he made his home on **Changliu** Mountain, where he could rule over the Western Heavens. In union as father and son, they were responsible for the daily setting of the sun. In addition, Shaohao was thought to have introduced China to the twenty-five string lute.

Controversy over historicity

Whether Shaohao actually existed, or was a sovereign, is controversial.

*The Doubting Antiquity School of historians, represented by **Gu Jiegang**, posited that Shaohao was inserted into the orthodox legendary lineage of ancient rulers by **Han Dynasty** imperial librarian **Liu Xin**, as part of a wide-ranging campaign of editing ancient texts, in order to either justify the rule of the Han imperial house, or the brief **Xin Dynasty** that overthrew it. This theory posits that **Liu Xin** was keen to create a narrative of the succession of legendary kings and subsequent dynasties, which would satisfactorily reflect the "succession of five elements" theory of dynastic succession, as well as a rotation between different lineages, which would together legitimize the rule of the **Han Dynasty** and/or the succession by the **Xin Dynasty**.*

*There is general consensus that Shaohao was a real or legendary ruler of the **Dongyi**, a people who lived in eastern China. It is theorized that the worship of Shaohao was brought west by the Qin as they migrated west.*

*Documentary evidence of Shaohao originates in the extant version of the ancient text **Zuo Zhuan**, but the lineage recited there, that includes Shaohao, is not corroborated by contemporaneous or earlier texts. The Doubting Antiquity School therefore theorizes that **Liu Xin** took an existing but separate legendary figure, and inserted him into the legendary lineage of early rulers during his edit of the **Zuo Zhuan**. Whether, and at what point, Shaohao was inserted into the narrative of ancient Chinese rulers remains controversial amongst historians.*

ZHUANXU

Zhuanxu (Chinese: trad. 顓頊, simp. 颛顼, pinyin Zhuānxū), also known as Gaoyang (t. 高陽, 高阳, p. Gāoyáng), was a mythological emperor of ancient China.

In the traditional account recorded by **Sima Qian**, **Zhuanxu** was a grandson of the Yellow Emperor who led the **Shi Clan** in an eastward migration to present-day **Shandong**, where intermarriages with the **Dongyi Clan** enlarged and augmented their tribal influences.

At age twenty, he became their sovereign, going on to rule for seventy-eight years until his death.

Family

Zhuanxu was the grandson of the Yellow Emperor and his wife **Leizu** by way of his father **Changyi**. His mother was named **Changtsu** according to **Sima Qian**, **Niuqu** according to the Bamboo Annals.

Zhuanxu was subsequently claimed as an ancestor by many of the dynasties of Chinese history, including the **Mi** of **Chu** and **Yue**, the **Yíng** of **Qin**, and the **Cao** of **Wei**.

Reign

Zhuanxu was held by many sources to be one of the Five Emperors.

According to **Sima Qian's** Records of the Grand Historian, upon the passing of the Yellow Emperor, Zhuanxu's uncle **Shaohao** never actually reigned as king, as in other reports.

Rather, **Gaoyang** was chosen as the tribe's new leader, with the regal name Zhuanxu, in preference to his father and all his uncles. Zhuanxu defeated **Gong Gong**, a descendant of the Emperor **Yan**.

However, the account in the Bamboo Annals states that Zhuanxu became an assistant to his uncle, Emperor Shaohao, at the age of ten, and became king in his own right at age 20.

He made contributions to a unified Calendar, Astrology, Religion reforms to oppose Shamanism, upheld the patriarchal (as opposed to the previous matriarchal) system, and forbade **Close-Kin** marriage.

The Bamboo Annals also credit him with composing one of the earliest pieces of music, known as :

"The Answer to The Clouds".

Zhuanxu was succeeded by his cousin, Shaohao's son, **Ku**. In the **Shiji**, he criticized one of his sons for being a **ullard**. Since only two sons were named, it might have been **Gun**, father of **Yu** the Great or **Qiongchan**, the ancestor of **Shun**. **Yao** had also criticized **Gun** for being **Incompetent** and **Ruinous**.

The **Shiji** labeled **Qiongchan** an insignificant commoner though it does not mention how he fell from grace.

He also had eight unnamed sons of good repute that later worked for **Shun**.

Calendar

The Bamboo Annals record that in his 13th year of reign, Zhuanxu "invented calendric calculations and delineations of the heavenly bodies".

Since Zhuanxu was claimed as a founder of the **Qin Dynasty**, his name was taken for inauguration of the new calendar system by **Shi Huangdi**.

Mythology

Zhuanxu is also mentioned as a god of the Pole Star and as the father of **Taowu**.

KU

Kù (simplified Chinese: 瞽, traditional Chinese: 瞽), usually referred to as **Dì Kù** (simplified Chinese: 帝瞽, traditional Chinese: 帝瞽), also known as **Gaoxīn** or **Gāoxīn Shì** (Chinese: 高辛氏), was (according to many versions of the list) one of the Five Emperors of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors of Chinese mythology: some sources treat Ku as a semi-historical figure, while others make fantastic mythological or religious claims about him.

Besides varying in their degree of historicizing Ku, the various sources also differ in what specific stories about him they focus on, so that putting together the various elements of what is known regarding Ku results in a multifaceted story. **Ku**, or **Gaoxīn**, is also known as the "**White Emperor**".

Birth

Ku's lineage is derived from descent from the legendary Yellow Emperor, then through the line of Shaohao (as opposed to the line through **Changyi**, which led to Zhuanxu).

He was the son of **Qiaoji** (嫫極/嫫极), and thus grandson to **Shaohao**, and great-grandson to **Yellow Emperor**.

According to speculative dates calculated after 100 BC by **Liu Xin**, he is supposed to have ruled from c. 2436 BC to c. 2366 BC, though other dates are also mentioned.

As emperor

When he became emperor, Ku added the title **Dì**, meaning "Emperor", or "God-emperor", in front of his name. After achieving the imperial title, Ku was said to travel seasonally by riding a dragon in spring and summer, and a horse in autumn and winter.

Among other things, Ku was said to be an inventor of musical instruments and composer of songs.

According to the **Lüshi Chunqiu**, drums, bells, chimes, pipes, ocarinas, and flutes were all invented, on the orders of Ku, by his subordinate **Yourui**; Ku's lyrics had musical scores composed by his assistant **Xianhei**; and by a further imperial command, a dance accompaniment was provided by a Phoenix.

Although Ku held the title **Dì**, it is unclear what territory, if any, his empire might have consisted of.

The same title **Di** was later assumed by the King of **Qin**, upon conquering his neighboring kingdoms and forging them into the first historically-known empire of China.

Wives

Ku had several wives. There is a group of four ladies with whom Ku consorted. These are :

***Jiang Yuan, Jiandi, Qingdu, and Changyi.** Once each of these ladies had given birth to a son, Ku had a diviner foretell for him which of the sons was destined to rule the empire, and he received the answer that all four would.*

*Another source mentions a lady with whom he had eight sons, each one born after she had dreamed of swallowing the sun; although her name is uncertain, she was said to be from **Zoutu**.*

Descendants

According to some traditions, Ku had four sons to four different wives; each of these four sons was ancestral founder of a Chinese dynasty, or inherited the empire.

*He is known in these sources as the father of **Houji, Xie, Yao, and Zhi**.*

*He is also said to have had two sons who became star gods, **Ebo** and **Shichen**.*

*The first of Ku's sons to rule the kingdom was **Emperor Zhi**, who was the son of **Changyi**.*

*Another of his sons later became the **Emperor Yao**.*

*Ku's son **Xie**, born miraculously to **Jiandi** after she swallowed the egg of a black bird, became the Pre-dynastic founder of the ruling family of the **Shang Dynasty**.*

*Ku's son **Houji**, born miraculously to **Jiang Yuan** after she stepped in the footprint of a god, became the Pre-dynastic founder of the lineage of the **Zhou Dynasty**.*

Bamboo Annals

In the Bamboo Annals, one of the earliest sources, it is mentioned that when Emperor **Zhuanxu** died, a descendant of **Shennong** named **Shuq** raised a disturbance, but was destroyed by the prince of Sin, who was **Ku (Gaoxin)**, a descendant of Huangdi, who then ascended to the throne.

It also states that Ku "was born with double rows of teeth, and had the wisdom of a sage", and that he "made blind men beat drums, and strike bells and sounding stones, at which Phoenixes flapped their wings and gamboled".

The Annals further record that in the 16th year of his reign, he sent his **General Chung** to defeat the state of **Yukwai**.

In the 45th year, Ku designated the prince of **Tang** (his son **Yao**) as his successor, however upon his death in the 63rd year, his elder son **Zhi** then took the throne instead, ruling 9 years before being deposed and replaced by **Yao**.

YAO

Emperor Yao (simplified Chinese: 尧; traditional Chinese: 堯; pinyin: Yáo; traditionally c. 2356 – 2255 BC) was a legendary Chinese ruler, according to various sources, one of the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors.

Ancestry and early life

Yao's ancestral name (姓) is **Yi Qi** (伊祁) or **Qi** (祁), clan name is **Taotang** (陶唐), given name is **Fangxun** (放勳), as the second son to Emperor Ku and **Qingdu** (慶都).

He is also known as **Tang Yao** (唐堯).

Yao's mother has been worshipped as the goddess **Yao-mu**.

Legacy

Often extolled as the morally perfect and intelligent **Sage-King**, Yao's benevolence and diligence served as a model to future Chinese monarchs and emperors.

Early Chinese often speak of **Yao**,

Shun and **Yu** the Great as historical figures, and contemporary historians believed they may represent leader-chiefs of allied tribes who established a unified and hierarchical system of government in a transition period to the patriarchal feudal society.

In the Classic of History one of the Five Classics, the initial chapters deals with **Yao**, **Shun** and **Yu**.

Legends

According to the legend, Yao became the ruler at 20 and died at 119 when he passed his throne to **Shun** the Great, to whom he had given his two daughters in marriage.

According to the Bamboo Annals, Yao abdicated his throne to **Shun** in his 73rd year of reign, and continued to live during Shun's reign for another 28 years.

Contributions

*Of his many contributions, Yao is said to have invented the game of **Weiqi**, reportedly to favorably influence his vicious playboy son **Danzhu**.*

*After the customary three-year mourning period after Yao's death, **Shun** named **Danzhu** as the ruler but the people only recognized Shun as the rightful heir.*

Bamboo Annals

*The Bamboo Annals represent Yao as having banished prince **Danzhu** to **Danshui** in his 58th year of reign. They add that following Yao's abdication in favor of **Shun**, **Danzhu** kept away from **Shun**, and that following the death of Yao, "**Shun** tried to yield the throne to him, but in vain."*

However, an alternative account found elsewhere in the Annals offers a different story. It holds that :

***Shun** dethroned and imprisoned **Yao**, then raised **Danzhu** to the throne for a short time before seizing it himself.*

Dynastic succession

*Yao was claimed to be the ancestor of the **Han Dynasty Emperor Liu Bang**.*

Other important noble families have also claimed descent through Yellow Emperor.

Astronomical observations

According to some Chinese classic documents such as :

Yao Dian (Document of Yao) in **Shang Shu** (Book of Ancient Time), and **Wudibenji** (Records for the Five Kings) in the **Shiji** (Historic Records), the King Yao assigned astronomic officers to observe celestial phenomena such as the sunrise, sunset, and the rising of the evening stars.

This was done in order to make a solar and lunar calendar with 366 days for a year, also providing for the leap month.

Some recent archaeological work at **Taosi**, an ancient site in **Shanxi**, dating to 2300 BC–1900 BC, may have provided some evidence for this.

A sort of an ancient observatory – the oldest in East Asia – was found at **Taosi** that seems to coincide with the ancient records.

Some Chinese archaeologists believe that **Taosi** was the site of a state **Youtang (有唐)** conquered by Emperor Yao and made to be his capital.

The structure consists of an outer semi-ring-shaped path, and a semi-round rammed-earth platform with a diameter of about 60 m; it was discovered in 2003–2004.

SHUN

Shun (Chinese: 舜, pinyin: Shùn), also known as Emperor Shun (Chinese: 帝舜, pinyin: **Dìshùn**) and Chonghua (Chinese: 重華, pinyin: **Chónghuá**), was a legendary leader of ancient China, regarded by some sources as one of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors.

Oral tradition holds that he lived sometime between 2294 and 2184 BC.

Names

Shun's ancestral name (姓) is **Yao** (姚), his clan name (氏) is **Youyu** (有虞).

His given name was **Chonghua** (重華). Shun is sometimes referred to as **The Great Shun** (大舜) or as **Yu Shun** (虞舜).

The "**Yu**" in "**Yu Shun**" was the name of the fiefdom, which **Shun** received from **Yao**; thus, providing him the title of "**Shun of Yu**".

Life of Shun

According to traditional sources, Shun received the mantle of leadership from Emperor **Yao** at the age of 53, and then died at the age of 100 years.

Before his death Shun is recorded as relinquishing his seat of power to **Yu**(禹):

an event which is supposed to have eventuated in the establishment of the **Xia Dynasty**. **Shun's** capital was located in **Puban** (蒲阪), presently located in **Shanxi**.

Under Emperor Yao, Shun was appointed successively Minister of Instruction, General Regulator and chief of the Four Peaks, and put all affairs in proper order within three years.

Yao was so impressed that he appointed Shun as his successor to the throne. Shun wished to decline in favor of someone more virtuous, but eventually assumed Yao's duties.

It was said that :

"Those who had to try a lawsuit did not go to **Danzhu**, but to Shun." **Danzhu** was the son of Yao.

After ascending to the throne, **Shun** offered sacrifices to the **God Shang Di** (上帝), as well as to the hills, rivers, and the host of spirits (神).

Then he toured the eastern, the southern, the western, and the northern parts of the country; in each place he offered burnt-offering to Heaven at each of the four peaks (Mount **Tai**, Mount **Huang**, Mount **Hua** and Mount **Heng**), sacrificed to the hills and rivers, set in accord the seasons, months, and days, established uniform measurements of length and capacities, and reinforced ceremonial laws.

Shun divided the land into twelve provinces, raising altars upon twelve hills, and deepening the rivers.

Shun dealt with four criminals: banishing the Minister of Works to **You** island, confining **Huan-dou** on Mount **Chong**; driving **San-Miao** into **San-Wei**, and holding **Gun** a prisoner till his death on Mount **Yu** (羽).

Yu (禹) was subsequently appointed Minister of Works to govern the water and the land.

Later, **Shun** appointed **Yu** to be General Regulator (Prime Minister). **Yu** wished to decline in favor of the Minister of Agriculture, **Xie**, or **Gao Yao**, but finally accepted upon Shun's insistence.

Shun then appointed **Chui** as the new Minister of Works. Shun also appointed **Yi** as Minister of Animal Husbandry to govern the beasts and trees of the land, **Bo-yi** as Priest of the Ancestral Temple to perform religious ceremonies, **Hui** as Director of Music, **Long** as Minister of Communications to counter deceptions and false reports.

According to the Canon of Shun, Shun began to reign at the age of 30, reigned with Yao for 30 years, and reigned 50 more years after Yao's abdication, and then Shun died.

The Bamboo Annals state that Yao chose Shun as his heir three years before abdicating the throne to him.

Both sources agree that after abdicating, Yao lived for another 28 years in retirement during Shun's reign.

*In later centuries, Yao and Shun were glorified for their virtue by Confucian philosophers. Shun was particularly renowned for his modesty and filial piety (**Xiao** 孝).*

*The name of Shun's mother was **Wodeng** (握登), and his birthplace was **Yaoxu** (姚墟).*

FREEA

Legends

Legend has it that Shun's birth mother died when Shun was very young.

His father was blind and remarried soon after Shun's mother's death.

*Shun's stepmother then gave birth to Shun's half-brother **Xiang** (象) and a half-sister.*

Shun's stepmother and half-brother treated Shun terribly, often forcing Shun to do all the hard work in the family and only giving him the worst food and clothing.

Shun's father, being blind and elderly, was often ignorant of Shun's good deeds and always blamed Shun for everything.

Yet, despite these conditions, Shun never complained and always treated his father, his stepmother, and his half-brother with kindness and respect.

When he was barely an adult, his stepmother threw him out of the house.

Shun was forced to live on his own.

Yet, because of his compassionate nature and his natural leadership skills, everywhere he went, people followed him, and he was able to organize the people to be kind to each other and do the best they could.

When Shun first went to a village that produced pottery, after less than one year, the pottery became more beautiful than they had ever been.

When Shun went to a fishing village, the people there were at first fighting amongst themselves over the fishing grounds, and many people were injured or killed in the fights.

Shun taught them how to share and allocate the fishing resources, and soon the village was prospering and all hostilities ceased.

When Emperor Yao became old, he became distressed over the fact that his 9 sons were all useless, only knew how to spend their days enjoying themselves with wine and song.

Yao asked his administrators, the Four Mountains, to propose a suitable successor. Yao then heard of Shun's tales. Wise Yao did not want to simply believe in the tales about Shun, so he decided to test Shun. Yao gave a district to Shun to govern and married his two daughters to him, with a small dowry of a new house and some money.

Though given an office and money, Shun still lived humbly.

He continued to work in the fields every day. Shun even managed to convince his two brides, the two princesses, Yao's daughters, named **Ehuang (Fairy Radiance)** and **Nüying (Maiden Bloom)**, who were used to good living, to live humbly and work along the people.

However, Shun's stepmother and half-brother became extremely jealous and conspired to kill Shun.

Once, Shun's half-brother **Xiang** lit a barn on fire, and convinced Shun to climb onto the roof to put the fire out, but then Xiang took away the ladder, trapping Shun on the burning roof.

Shun skillfully made a parachute out of his hat and cloth and jumped down in safety.

Another time, Xiang and his mother conspired to get Shun drunk and then throw him into a dried-up well and then bury him with rocks and dirt.

Shun's half-sister, never approving of her mother and brother's schemes, told Shun's wives about the scheme. Shun thus prepared himself.

Shun pretended to get drunk, and when he was thrown into the well, he had already a tunnel pre-dug to escape to the surface.

Thus, Shun survived many attempts on his life. Yet, he never blamed his stepmother or his half-brother, and forgave them every time.

Eventually, Shun's stepmother and half-brother repented their past wrongs. Shun wholeheartedly forgave them both, and even helped Xiang get an office.

Shun also managed to influence Emperor Yao's 9 worthless sons into becoming useful contributing members of society.

Emperor Yao was very impressed by all of Shun's achievements, and thus chose Shun as his successor and put him on the throne in the year of **Jiwei (己未)**. Yao's capital was in **Ji (冀)** which in modern times is also in Shanxi province.

Shun is also renowned as the originator of the music called **Dashao (大韶)**, a symphony of nine Chinese musical instruments.

In the last year of Shun's reign, Shun decided to tour the country.

But unfortunately, he died suddenly of an illness on the journey near the **Xiang** River.

Both his wives rushed from home to his body, and wept by the river for days.

Their tears turned into blood and stained the reeds by the river.

From that day on, the bamboo of that region became red-spotted, which explains the origin of spotted bamboo. Then overcome by grief, both women threw themselves into the river and drowned.

Shun considered his son, **Shangjun (商均)**, as unworthy and picked **Yu**, the tamer of floods, as his heir.

Alternative biography

The Bamboo Annals and **Han Fei** paint a very different picture of Shun. He is said to have overthrown **Yao** and left him in prison to die. **Danzhu**, Yao's son and rightful heir, was banished and later defeated in battle.

Yu then rebelled and banished **Shun**.

This account was referenced in a poem by **Li Bai**.

Elements of this story depict Shun as a usurper. He comes from a family of criminals that claim to be descended from **Zhuanxu**, and thus distantly related to the royal family.

The **Hanfeizi** also mentioned that Shun personally settled land and water disputes among farmers and fishermen by cohabitating with them.

FREEVA

NOTES

THIS WORK IS MADE POSSIBLE THANKS TO TWO SOURCESS

THE FIRST :

The world Wikipedia

THE SECOND :

Is an application with the same name made by

THEOGO LIDDLE

A Brazilian programmer

I took the structure of the app so the reader will feel familiar to it

THANK YOU FOR READING

天孫

神

EGGA

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帝